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The Trauma of Mennonite Scholarly and Literary Representation

by

Matthew Unger

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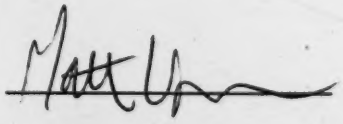

Matthew Peter Unger
8 Highcliff Road, Sherwood Park,
Alberta, T8A 5C2

02/01/23

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *The Trauma of Mennonite Scholarly and Literary Representation* submitted by Matthew Peter Unger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

Willi Braun

Francis Landy

Leendert Mos

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Abstract

If there is something to Stuart Hall's statement that identity is constituted through its own representation, then it is important to examine the assumptions that pervade the discourse from which this identity arises. In this thesis I examine how the traumatic past of a group, namely Mennonites, can determine how subsequent identity formations are constructed through historical/sociological scholarship, literary criticism and poetry. By drawing on proponents of Trauma Theory, such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, Critical and Cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, I will examine how the constructed narrative history of contemporary Mennonites perpetuates and even creates the sense of a perpetual crisis. This crisis makes itself known in the implicit conflict between these statements on historical Mennonite identities, through the assumptions embedded within the frameworks that these scholars employ, and the assumptions of Mennonite literary criticism and poetry. In order to repair the discord that exists between Mennonite historical/sociological and literary criticism and poetry, both literatures need to examine the assumptions from which they work and adopt new frameworks in order to properly work through the traumas of the past and the present.

Preface

This project is the result of the patience and support of many people of whom I can only mention a few. It has come from conversations that date back into my childhood, the table talk and history sessions with my family and the rare but significant meetings with my extended family. There are also specific people that have contributed immensely to the rise of this specific project. Of course, my thesis supervisor, Professor Willi Braun, has spent countless hours labouring over various drafts and scratching his head over random absurd and incoherent ideas to help make this paper possible to read. Professor Leo Mos has also offered great support and encouragement throughout my studies for the Master's degree. Professor Francis Landy has pointed me in many fruitful directions, both with ideas and books, but also with writing. Finally, I am indebted to The Welcome Home Community, the place that has granted me rewarding employment over the past couple years, and the people with whom I work, for their endless patience and lenience during this lengthy process.

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Introduction

When there is an expression of a personal identity there is often an indication of an implicit struggle. A tension seems to arise between the individual's sense of what she has done, from where she comes, and where she believes she is going. There is the tendency to situate oneself in the "always already" and the "not there yet." However, the "always already" seems to help the individual in a teleological closure of the "not there yet." For example, if I were baking a cake, the picture in the recipe book would calm me into thinking that my cake will eventually turn out like the one pictured (despite the fact that it is most likely a wax replica). The closure and hope that the recipe provides in choosing what to bake comes into direct dissonance, almost inevitably for myself at least, with the final product. This may be acknowledged, but it will not (hopefully) inhibit the process of enjoying the cake all the same. What this metaphor can help us with is the inevitable and necessary tension between the discourses of closure that contribute to a sense of identity and the ways it remains open to difference, over time and space, and contestation.

We can extend the above comparison a bit further. The reasons I choose, say, a cherry cheesecake (which incidentally does not need to be baked) can be very complex. I could choose it for reasons that make it suitable for specific times and situations: for instance, "because it is my birthday today and it is my favourite cake," or "because I can only find these ingredients in my apartment." Apart from the importance of these internal musings that lead to the final decision, the reason I choose this recipe becomes situated in relation to other recipes: "I choose this cake because it is not a pot-roast." Within this

selection, then, is a complicated move of identification and affiliation, not to mention the more discursive reasons for this decision: "My parents owned a cheesecake shop so I consequentially ate a lot of cheesecake and it became my favourite." To draw this comparison to a close: identity is also about the selective stirring of all internal and external forces. Identity is about difference and exclusion of those things not essential to one's sense of self, as well as those that exist in a positive relation with one's identity.

In this thesis I will explore some factors in the production of Mennonite identities and identification. I will explore how these identities are portrayed in Mennonite scholarship and literature and examine the implicit assumptions that determine the direction of this literature. I am interested in exploring this not only because I am from a Russian Mennonite background but because what I think is at the heart of the conflict in these literatures also lies deep within the nature of language and subjectivity: a traumatic ambivalence that, while potentially devastating and threatening, also brings identity reconstructions into a space of "otherness" that can allow for possibilities of growth and change. In three chapters I will attempt to trace the patterns of a trauma that contribute to, or possibly inhibit, the representation and affirmation of current Mennonite identities.

1) In chapter one I will explore the implicit assumptions and veiled traumatic recurrences within Mennonite sociological/historical scholarship. I will use trauma theory as it has been developed by Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra as my theoretical foundations of this chapter. This foundation will support the rest of the thesis. This will allow me to examine how trauma persists in the texts of Mennonite scholars and how this can, in turn, affect the identities of its constituent readers. This chapter will follow a

tertiary scheme. First, I will examine how certain authors' assumed marks of Mennonite identity are in the end constructed theological categories that are selectively chosen as are the frameworks from which the authors work. Secondly, I will argue that these fundamental tenets and frameworks used to examine and define Mennonite identity differ from author to author, and in varying degrees can perpetuate and even recreate a trauma that has been with Mennonites since their inception. Thirdly, I will try to argue that this trauma is one that is perpetuated through these assumptions and frameworks and has the potential to predispose Mennonite identity as inherently and diametrically opposed to its contemporaneous surroundings and thus to difference outside the group. The way to work through this trauma, I will suggest, is to become aware of the conditions that give rise to the construction of Mennonite identities in scholarship and adopt different assumptions both about Mennonite identity as well as the function of difference and otherness within the community.

2) The second chapter consists of four main sections in which I will argue that there is an inherent ambivalence in the representation of Mennonite identities and that this contributes to divergent assumptions between Mennonite sociological/historical scholarship and Mennonite literary criticism. The first section will explore select Mennonite poetry that is concerned with difference within the boundaries of the Mennonite communities from which these poets come. This will allow us to see implicit tensions between the scholarship discussed in the first chapter and the literary criticism that is the focus in the second chapter. The second section explores some of the predominant debates within Mennonite literary criticism, such as the relation of the poet to structures of

difference. This will lead to the criticism that Mennonite identities are constructed in literary criticism with the assumptions of a polarized master narrative of insider/outsider. I argue in the third section that this is indeed insightful and can carry Mennonite literary criticism to different theoretical levels, but that there will have to be a critical approach to this theory. The fourth section will attempt a reading of Homi Bhabha's theory of the Third Space in order to gain insight into the reasons for the paradoxical conflict between sociological/historical scholarship and literary criticism. With this reading of Bhabha and the categories it allows, I argue that this conflict is the result of the trauma that exists in sociological/historical scholarship. This conflict, while potentially due to literary criticism's relation to structures of difference in its object of study may, nevertheless, not allow for a proper dialogue between either body of scholarship. This indicates that both bodies need to examine the assumptions from which they are working in order to work through this traumatic conflict, this rupture, to allow a more creative expression of Mennonite identities.

3) Chapter three is concerned with examining theoretical literature that can allow for a new approach from which to understand the creation and formation of identification and affiliations. While a good body of contemporary theory suggests that identity is formed by exclusion and polar difference, I argue that this is not the only way to think of the construction of identity. With the help of Patrick Friesen's poem, *The Shunning*, I will look at different ways 'otherness' can exist and help determine the inherent contingency of identity. This formulation of a contingent identity is more than an identity formed by random and accidental occurrences. It is an identity that is formed through a trauma that

is a part of every identity and the language that brings it into representation. The proper acknowledgement of this is what allows the individual a creative means to deal with the difference that lies at the heart of the subject. This is a traumatic ambivalence that allows the individual to move into a positive space which, in the interaction with difference and otherness, permits change and growth.

Chapter 1

The Trauma of Mennonite Scholarly Representation

> How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it cannot be 'remembered,' must be narrated. (Anderson, 1991: 204)

Trauma, being an inherent component of Mennonite identity throughout its multifarious history, is not necessarily a static term within in its community of reference. That is, the Mennonite communities' relationship to their respective traumas can be seen as a shifting one by the way trauma within Mennonite scholarship is articulated and how the location of trauma differs as one looks at the progression of Mennonite scholarly writing. Within this scholarly tradition, the location and significance of trauma has gradually shifted, bringing in divergences of discussion and various elements into historical purview. By examining this discourse, and predominantly the identity-in-conflict debate, the inherent trauma in contemporary Mennonite identity will become more visible.

In this chapter, I will look primarily at contemporary Mennonite historical/sociological scholarship to examine the changes in the indication of a trauma. To articulate Mennonite trauma will be significant, since by exploring some of the major issues that are debated, presented and explored within this scholarship I will be able to 'witness' the multiple scars that will crease the sheets of the frameworks used by these

scholars. The bumps and the folds of Mennonite experience that become represented under these frameworks will lead me to understand, or uncover perhaps, some of the inherent assumptions of this writing that will implicate the prevalent analytical priorities that have persisted through the history of this scholarship. The traumas that will be drawn out, then, are not necessarily the obvious traumas of the past, including the World Wars and the subsequent urbanization and dispersal of difference in contemporary society, but the location of a profound sense of loss within the writing itself.

The theoretical framework of my thesis will be drawn from theories on trauma exemplified by Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. With their conceptual tools, I will examine how episodes in the past have a collective function within and take hold of the subsequent identity formations of the Mennonite subject. This can challenge notions of historicity that are based upon referential models that, by the nature of their very structure, participate in very limited ways in the subject's dialogue with its own past. This will then implicate the role and inherent ambiguities of the act of history construction, and the expression of memory within individuals and groups that can take the form of cultural artifacts such as scholarly writing. Since most of the scholarly work on Mennonites has been done by in-group members, it generally reflects the hopes, aspirations, anxieties, and often praises of that community. Because of these particularistic tendencies the ability to read this literature as exemplary of the exploration of trauma within a collective becomes possible.

Theoretical Considerations – Caruth and LaCapra

In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth sees Freud as a pivotal figure who wrote insightfully about the condition that he called "trauma neuroses," now called post-traumatic stress disorder. She describes the experience of a trauma with reference to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* as not just a physical blow to the body, as is suggested etymologically, but the wounding of the tissue of the mind. Living through the experience of the death of a loved one, a potentially fatal accident, or simply experiencing something shockingly out of the ordinary, the individual becomes deeply affected, symptomatized by a perpetual replaying of the events of the initial incident. Through nightmares and hallucinations the individual is constantly being brought back to the traumatic milieu. (Caruth, 1996: 1-9)

The incident that occurred too quickly to be properly prepared for, the unexpected shock of the trauma, and the subsequent replaying of the event indicate that it had been, in effect, missed the first time. By being thrust back into the past both somatically and psychically, the individual is forced to play the dialectic between what is known and what escapes knowledge due to its sheer intensity. This unconscious binding to the past is not just a mere representation of the past but the literal return to the event because of its initial incomprehensibility. It is just as if the event was missed the first time and the individual must be brought back to it repeatedly for the reality of the trauma to be fully revealed.

A sub-text in Caruth's book suggests that while these incidents initially deny the possibility of knowing, they nevertheless have the potential to affect the identity of the individual or group. For example, the departure with Moses as he liberated the Hebrews

from Egypt, instantiated their subsequent identity as a Jewish people. By drawing parallels to individual trauma, she interprets Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* as the history of a collective that can also be seen as the history of trauma, one that persists and makes itself known through the group's survival. Despite the fictionalization of the Jewish history, Caruth argues that the trauma of the Jewish past and present are represented within the structure and events that transpired during the composition of *Moses and Monotheism*:

> The structure and history of the book, in its traumatic form of repression and repetitive appearance, thus mark it as the very bearer of a historical truth that is itself involved in the political entanglement of the Jews and their persecutors.(Caruth 20)

Paradoxically, despite Freud's disavowal of Judaism, the trauma of the history of the Jewish people and the persecution of the Jews during his time tied him ever more strongly to his past, the collective memory and the historical situation. Here we can see the existence of an apparent ethic that helps bind the members of the group that has experienced a trauma within its history.

Dominick LaCapra also examines the existence of a collective trauma that persists through texts. In his book *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory and Trauma*, LaCapra writes about the state of historical writing and thinking and engages in a psychoanalytically informed discussion on proper contextual descriptions combined with critical self-reflection for proper 'dialogic' engagements with the past. The framework that guides his writing is Freud's transferential model where the author's recognition of a present identity or subject-position, its continual affirmation and reshaping, is inextricably involved in his or her reconstruction and reading of the past. This is an multiply-layered

issue as it outlines the personal nature of the enterprise of representation as it attempts to come to terms with the loss and reproduction of meaning, as well as the effort of adequately representing the destruction and subsequently necessary reconstruction of identities. The Holocaust is his area of inquiry precisely because of the problems it poses and the limits it pushes in the reconstruction of meaning and identities. The complexities inherent within this field of study test the ability for a dialogic relationship with the past that allows for meaningful and adequate identities to form in the present. LaCapra is especially concerned with the possibilities of "disavowal" or "acting-out." That is, he examines ways in which contemporary identifications with and reconstructions of the Holocaust engage either in latent processes of negation or in over-identification with the trauma that can be shown through the language and structure of the project of inquiry.

'Origins' of Mennonite Scholarship

If some sort of trauma lies inherent within the writing of Mennonite scholarship, then the first problem will be to diagnose it. Without delving too far into scientific metaphor, I should like to read several examples of Mennonite sociological scholarship to bring out certain symptomatic traits of what I would designate as forms of "acting-out." LaCapra defines acting-out as the "projective processing of the past through which we deny certain of its features and act-out our desires for self-confirming or identity-forming meaning" (LaCapra, 1994: 64). I will examine how through some scholarship, a trauma is created and perpetuated through certain arguments and frameworks and varying

attachments to certain historical features of Mennonite identity. I will look primarily at the identity-in-conflict debate, to examine how, despite the secular frameworks used, authors still write with the hope of the continuity of the Mennonite church in mind. It is not my concern to examine the politics and risks of heavily invested (in-group) scholarship in this chapter; Daphne Winland does an impressive job at this (Winland 1988, 1993). My concern is, first, to establish the fact that this subjective experience is at the heart of this scholarship and, second, that this indicates certain implicit features about Mennonites themselves, particularly the sense of a continuing trauma that has brought Mennonite identity to the forefront with the identity-in-crisis debate.

Since, as Stuart Hall states, "[i]dentities are...constituted within, not outside of representation" (Hall,1996: 4), we must look to various forms of representation to see how identities are constructed. This makes examining writings an important task, since the assumptions within representation become evident in the way in which identities are portrayed that, conversely, affect the identities that are being written about. This is especially true in the case of Mennonites, since the ability for this scholarship to influence current Mennonite identities is quite strong as this writing is at once an attempt at an accurate representation of the past and a reconstruction that informs the Mennonite community about their current identity. This sociological/historical writing is often recommended for leaders of congregations to help plan the social life and worship practices of their church as well as the economic and financial concerns of the

congregation.[1] As well, since the chief body of the literature done on Mennonites is by Mennonites, it predisposes non-Mennonites, including the academic community, to use this work in the reconstruction of Mennonite life. Daphne Winland, a sociologist who specializes in Mennonite and Jewish scholarship, comments on the particularistic leanings in much Mennonite scholarship: "[the] work of Mennonite scholars can...be understood as being based, to varying degrees, on premises informed by their own ideologies, particular motivations and interests." Yet, despite the pitfalls of this form of writing, she has still found that Mennonite scholars have remained very aware of and even raised the sensitivity towards issues of subjectivity, objectivity and accountability in scholarship: "Nonetheless, the search for a viable tradition has resulted in a critical and reflexive Mennonite scholarship" (Winland 1993: 440). At the same time, the critically sympathetic writings of these scholars can make an interesting case study in how assumptions of how scholars view contemporary identities affect the reconstructions of those identities.

I argue in this chapter that the reasons why Mennonite scholarship is currently focussed on certain issues and frameworks is not necessarily unconnected to unconscious ways of wanting to read the current Mennonite condition. It is no accident then, that the sociological approaches that I will examine in the end reaffirm various theological categories that have been developed in Mennonite history, including those which founded

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[1]Note Kaufmann and Driedger: "The surveys [in the *Mennonite Mosaic*] were designed to provide information to a wide range of church boards, agencies, and programs, many of which were consulted in the planning stages of the project." (Kaufmann and Driedger, 1991: 22)

Anabaptist/Mennonite existence in the sixteenth century. Depending on how reflexive the author is, this could have the possibility of consequentially writing the traumas of the past into the identity of contemporary Mennonites. The importance of examining Mennonite scholarship in this way is warranted by the effects of the Mennonite identity-in-crisis debate in historical/sociological scholarship.

When one examines Mennonite scholarship one finds a very tense yet often implicit argument. There is the tendency towards genuine concern for the continuity and survival of certain and, as we will see, differing, traditional Mennonite precepts that peer through these humanistic historical/sociological frameworks. These differing particularistic notions embedded within this scholarship create conflicting ideas and ardent discussions on contemporary Mennonite self-understanding. These discussions focus heavily on the effects of modernization and secularization which ultimately create a split in the understanding of the ethnic and religious components of Mennonite identities. A large concern of Mennonite scholars can be formulated as a question: given the heterogeneity of Mennonites that has developed over the past four centuries, can there still be common strands of identity that could enable the establishment of a sense of a common heritage beyond the shared name of "Anabaptism" itself? The majority of current scholars who write on the condition of Mennonites consistently use "origins" to place a normative understanding over the diversity of the history of Mennonites. For example, in the case of Harold Bender, the major criticism of his writings is that he only accounted for a single Anabaptist/Mennonite origin, which was later refuted in a debate that argued that Anabaptism's beginnings should be understood as a "polygenesis" (for the programmatic

article on the polygenetic origins and a call for a revised historiography of Anabaptist origins, see Stayer, 1975). Bender was heavily criticized by non-Swiss Mennonite scholars for occluding a large degree of diversity in Mennonite identities.

While this debate is no longer as heated as it used to be, the origins that are now examined are slightly more abstract. More often than not, the selected origins that are used to legitimate more recent scholarship are *theo-ontological*, where it is understood that the identities of Mennonites have been determined by various theological principles throughout their history. These selected origins then are used in the manufacturing and maintenance of contemporary identities. Stuart Hall states that "identities...relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as endless reiteration but as 'the changing same'"(Hall, 1996: 4). In this sense, tradition is a constructed process whereby the sense of origin arises partly "in fantasy." As well, the tradition that is written is used to determine the current identity through a kind of retrospective teleology, where the present and future are a continuation of the past. As well, this, inevitably imaginative reconstruction of history is thus "subject to the inventive, occluding, refractive ramifications of retrospection" (Braun, 2001: 8) where this "changing same" is re-presented in light of current ideological and discursive struggles and leanings.

Mennonite Scholarly Assumptions

Mennonite historical/sociological scholars generally juxtapose fundamental tenets of modernity with foundational elements in Mennonite heritage. Despite the fact that the origins which are invented in current scholarship to identify the Mennonites against

modernity may differ from those of Harold Bender, I believe that the secular categories and theo-ontological categories of Mennonite history and sociology, promote an understanding of contemporary Mennonite identity as "phylogenetically" opposed to the contemporary. That is, the ideological assumptions that guide these writings determine the selection of Mennonite foundational precepts as well as the selection of secular sociological frameworks from which they work and, in their extreme, predetermine Mennonite identity as always already predisposed to opposing its contemporaneous surroundings. For example, key arguments in current Mennonite sociological and historical scholarship have embraced theories of secularization and modernization which lead the authors to determine that the resulting privatization of religion has slowly chipped away at the sense of a Mennonite "peoplehood" and identity. Here, I will look at two sociological examples that predispose foundational Mennonite characteristics to resist and oppose the ideological underpinnings of modernity.

Joseph Smucker in his essay "Religious Community and Individualism: Conceptual Adaptations by One Group of Mennonites" draws on theories of secularization developed by Mary Douglas. As the world becomes increasingly secular, he argues, a religious group advances through three stages which are not necessarily distinct. Initially, the group experiences a contempt for external religious/ritual forms. Secondly, the group's "religious experience" is increasingly internalized and privatized. Finally, there is the move to a humanist philanthropy and the emergence of a modified or new symbolic system (Smucker, 1988: 273-291). In line with a strong trend in Mennonite sociological scholarship, Smucker posits three "eroding" influences in present-day society that

challenge the "fundamental" defining characteristics of Mennonitism. The first one is a liberal political ideology that questions the assumptions of a tightly-controlled and separatist community. Second, the proliferation of technology and its use becomes a direct threat to dependancy relationships; the concept of mutual aid is challenged with the acceptance of higher-yield technology. The third influence is the rise in pietism, individual salvation, or spiritual individualism which challenges the notion of a communal reference point. He concludes that these issues have effectively created great discord within the Anabaptist-Mennonite communities and that certain aspects of modernity have created many fissures and divisions in the interpretation of an Anabaptist-Mennonite identity, resulting in the separation of the Amish and Hutterite groups from earlier mainstream groups. Accordingly, Mennonites must now redefine themselves and their theological-existential purposes in order to survive and grow in the increasingly secular and individualistic future that seemingly has little in common with historical Mennonite understanding.

Similarly, Driedger and Kauffman correlate five indicators of urbanization in a constant dialectic of change with five indicators of Mennonite identity that lead to the transformation and erosion of identity. These indicators of modernity include urbanization, education, occupation, income and mobility. The indicators of Mennonite identity are religiosity, community, family, institutions and ethnicity. The resulting dialectic is described as secularization versus sacralization, individualism versus communalism and materialism versus peoplehood. Again, it is the secularization and modernization of Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger (1966; see also Berger, 1967) that

theoretically guides this literature where the core values of Mennonites — communalism, sacralization and peoplehood — are diametrically opposed to those of broader modern society — secularization, individualism and materialism. The result is the accommodation and acclimatization of contemporary Mennonites towards modernity at an increasing rate — more people are leaving the church, church issues and discipline have become more lax and liberal, and there are further church separations and broader conference disturbances. While Kauffman and Driedger's study is extensive and detailed, I would like to propose that some of the assumptions that guide their work have the possibility of fostering a melancholic and traumatic perspective towards contemporary society, a perspective that will potentially never be resolved. This can be seen as melancholic in the way the language and categories used contribute to the sense of Mennonites' inability to connect ideologically to their surroundings and doesn't allow for new interpretations of the current situation of Mennonites. Their work has been criticized for homogenizing a very heterogeneous and amorphous group of people and marginalizing those whose experience does not fit in with the "vision" that animates a good body of Mennonite scholarship and writing (Winland, 1988; 1992).

Even the secular frameworks from which these scholars are working have the potential for reinterpretation and revision which can make more evident that interpretation is essential to representation. That is, the framework used can determine, to an extent, what elements are emphasized, analysed or described. For example, Stephen Warner presents an interpretation of the secularization debate that highlights the necessity for further reflexivity in order to challenge some predominant ways of understanding the

contemporary situation. Warner challenges the notion that secularization occurs as a function of modernization in the way Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann state. Early Bergerian sociology indicated, and this is assumed throughout Leo Driedger's and Joseph Smucker's work on Mennonites, that the increase in modernization also effected an increase in religious mobilization. This interpretation is something that would have a wholly negative effect on the state of religion since it necessarily indicates the demise of communal values and lessen the connection to a heritage. This has generated a great deal of concern for Mennonite scholars. Warner quotes Lipset in refuting findings in this vein of inquiry by stating "the United States has been the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom" (Warner, 1991:1049). He also challenges Berger's theories of the "sacred canopy" by suggesting that in actuality "maintaining supernatural religious belief in US society is not particularly difficult" and that there are "high levels of self-reported belief in God and devotional and attitudinal religiosity...among the unchurched" (Warner 1991: 1053). This indicates that secularization may indicate the increasing mobility of the adherents of religion where they do not necessarily remain committed for long periods of time to one church or even to one denomination in particular. This means that new ways of reading the function of religion in contemporary society is necessary to account for differing manifestations of the values examined.

Even though Driedger and Kauffman's research on current Mennonite identities allows room for reflexive engagement that challenges of the use of secularization theory, in some cases Mennonite scholarship may promote a melancholy of representation since it

rests upon an idyllic notion of the past of Mennonites against which the present is compared and the future anticipated. This disavows certain aspects of Mennonite history, the interpreted current modern state and limits the conditions of possibility from which to recreate current identities. LaCapra writes of disavowal where the occlusion of historical conditions is not simply the outright denial of history, like in the blunt extremism of revisionist history, but where historical reconstructions negate the possibility of engaging with the past and inhibit processes of creative identity formation in the present. The fact that secularization may not be occurring in the way Berger proposed, but more likely the opposite, that religion has become a predominant form of social change, could be a disavowal of Mennonite institutions and various social formations as the current locators of identity. This would, then, inhibit the selection of historical elements of Mennonites that would prohibit Mennonites to adapt to the current broader social situation.[2]

Acting-Out or Working-Through Scholarship

LaCapra argues that another form of disavowal is the appropriation and inscription of the trauma within religious categories of identity formation, such as purification and sacrificialism, that indicates a kind of mythical transformation of the incident or

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[2]This is, of course, when taken to its limit. This is actually not the case with Mennonite scholarship. Recently, there has been a lot of writing concerning the fact that institutions such as the Mennonite Central Committee or the MennoniteVoluntary Service act as strong locators of a shared sense of peoplehood despite the lack of a geographic center of meaning. Leo Driedger and Calvin Redekop are also quite aware of these factors, and embrace them within their recent writings. Driedger has recently published *Mennonites in a Global Context* which is an extremely impressive treatment of Mennonite identity and the challenges it faces in a postmodern context.

circumstance. With the use of normative "Anabaptist vision" theological categories, the historical Mennonite trauma is inscribed into sacred categories. While this may well serve purposes of redemptive memories, in the extreme it avoids reflexive and critical engagement with the past for the recovery of a less painful memory and identification with the past and present. The identity-in-crisis debate is a clear example of how writers determine their object of study through subjective processes by selection and theological privileging. This debate is largely focussed around the bifurcation between the religious aspects and the ethnic dimensions of Mennonite contemporary identity. For instance, Calvin Redekop discloses this split in his *Mennonite Society*:

> The conclusions reached in this book have been reached after a number of decades of teaching and working in Mennonite institutions. I begin by suggesting that there are now two kinds of Mennonites: the Germanic (the birthright descendants) and the non-Germanic (the converted and convinced non-descendants). The latter are so different and diverse that it is almost impossible to say much about them – they are probably the closest to the original utopian nature of Anabaptism-Mennonitism. The future clearly belongs to them. (Redekop, 1989: xii-xiii)

There are several key points in this quote that must be elaborated. First, he acknowledges his subject-position as an insider, writing from a certain point of view (a knowledgeable one from within "Mennonite institutions") so that we can assume that his writing is aimed towards other insiders (he mentions that he hopes it "will help other members." [Redekop, 1989: xi]). This quote also implies many elements within the identity-in-conflict debate. There are normative assumptions about these elements, apparently separable into the "birthright descendants" and the non-ethnic "converted" to which the "future belongs." Redekop states that "the converted and convinced non-

descendants" are so different and diverse that "it is almost impossible to say anything about them," indicating the difficulty to place the identity of this group of Mennonites into predetermined categories of knowledge. Yet, in the next sentence he states that the "future clearly belongs to them," emphasizing the last clause in the previous sentence: "they are probably the closest to the original utopian nature of Anabaptism-Mennonitism." This makes quite clear that the past determines the future, since the group that can not be determined in this quote is always already determined by the theological origins of the group. He teleologically predetermines the group by selected and constructed historical elements of Mennonitism. This grants an analytical priority to the religious component of their identity.

There is also a slight ethnic embarrassment in this quote as well. He later describes the Germanic Mennonites as an initially religious, evangelical movement whose evangelical impetus was repressed for the continuing survival of the group in the move to enclavic separated communities. The time following the move into communes was, in Redekop's estimation, "a dark period" when "the prophetic impulse was subordinated" (Redekop, 1989: xii). This seems at first like the kind of evangelical Mennonitism that was proclaimed by Bender who privileged the vision of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists as *the* Anabaptist vision. The difference is that although Redekop acknowledges the multiple origins of Anabaptism as well as the pitfalls of sentimentality, he sees the present as perpetually in conflict with Mennonite continuity, whereas for Bender, Anabaptism is the summation of the Reformation and heralded the modern period. For example, Redekop affirms the interpretation that "holds that Anabaptism is the culmination of the

Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli and thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles" (Bender, 1944: 12-13). Within this quote we can see the origin of Anabaptist/Mennonites that Redekop employs, as essentially an evangelical utopian movement. Redekop, in the end, worries about a "durable cohesive principle that can assure its [Anabaptisms'] survival" or whether we will "witness its [inevitable] dissolution" (Redekop, 1989: xiii).

Not all Mennonite scholars share Redekop's view that ideological precepts of a social movement determine its institutional framework. This is indicative of the diversity of ideas on what it means to be Mennonite, including foundational elements and their derivatives. In other words, the aporia left within the wake of the attempts at constructing a homogenous Mennonite identity indicates an incongruity between the present context of a people, the situations into which Mennonites were forced in various historical situations, and the theological categories that justify its existence. This aporia has been theorized by key scholars as an "identity crisis." This crisis is itself, I believe, the result of the homogenizing influence of some of this scholarship. One would need to ask then, is this crisis really a crisis of identity, or is it a crisis of imagination and articulation by those who write about identity issues?

I should like to examine several essays that are emblematic of this debate. The first one is "The Sociology of Mennonite Identity: A Second Opinion" by Calvin Redekop, which aptly lays out the foundational premises for the identity crisis of contemporary Mennonites. The crisis, for Redekop, is not a crisis in the sense of an emergency situation

in need of remedy, but rather a theological call to continual self-analysis and awareness of what it means to be a contemporary Mennonite. Implicit within this call, and echoing Bender, is the recollection and restructuring of Mennonite identity by assuming the normativeness of the Anabaptist vision and utopian nature of the original founders. In this sense then, the crisis is not situational, but perpetual. He redefines the ethnic nature of Mennonites as not truly an ethnic group but, rather, as a peoplehood – as do Driedger and Kaufmann – an all-encompassing term that collapses all of the primary religious precepts and their subsequent social formations and patterns (Redekop, 1988: 27). This revisits and coalesces Mennonite theological categories of resistance to the hegemonic social order: Mennonites, to Redekop, are a group of people that have been and continue to be resistant to societal structures and need to redefine themselves in order to fulfill their eschatological purpose as counter-ideological activists.

On the other side, the ethnic side of things, Donald B. Kraybill defines the identity of Mennonites as fundamentally an ethnic group, a group that "has distinct cultural expressions beyond mere religious ones...[and a] common history, a collective biography, a transgenerational cultural legacy and a shared fate" (Kraybill, 1988: 157). Contrary to the ethnic discomfort of Redekop, Kraybill writes that in the threat of cultural assimilation in the modern period, Mennonites pursued a "vigorous program of cultural revitalization rather than passively acquiescing to the forces of modernity" (Kraybill, 1988: 163). Kraybill thus believes that Mennonites are not faced with a crisis but are constantly in a process of transformation. Communal tropes, such as suffering, which were used throughout Anabaptist-Mennonite communities' in Europe and Russia gave way to the

motif of humility in Pennsylvania. As well, Mennonites now identify themselves as Mennonite not necessarily by attending a Mennonite church, but by participating in one or more of the numerous Mennonite-sponsored institutions, such as volunteer and peace organizations, financial and consumer corporations, and credit unions. Mennonites are connected together not only by present practices but by their history, which is determined by who, when and how this history is invoked. While Kraybill's thoughts on cultural "transformation" yields insight that can "work-through" some of the identity crisis fall-out and promote an understanding of other aspects of contemporary formations of Mennonitism, it relies too heavily on ethnic privileging , thus occluding key aspects of Mennonite identity that Redekop discusses. Here, Kraybill believes that identity ends up relying on predominantly abstract and symbolic measures and reasserts a dualistic relation to the past by negating or even engaging in a disavowal of past traumas and the significance of the religious components of Mennonite identity. This imposes a unidimensional framework upon a diverse range of religious and ethnic mixtures.

Whereas Redekop and Kraybill have all made substantial contributions to the understanding of a Mennonite identity, despite some aspects that could lead to a form of disavowal, Hans-Jurgen Goertz's contribution is illustrative of a traumatic literature (Goertz, 1988). If traumatic literature is that which can not effectively bring to representation some aspect of identity through language to be able to "work-through" the trauma that has preoccupied an individual or group, then Goertz's formulation of the "identity crisis"participates in the creation of a perpetually traumatic present. He believes that the modern condition of Mennonites is marked with the inability to properly articulate

an identity, and as such can no longer hold onto a strong locator of identity. He defines the crisis thus: "The Mennonites' cognitive centre has dissolved and created a vacuum into which outer, nontraditional viewpoints have flooded and are struggling with one another to become the determiner of a new centre. The old centre has dissolved and the new is not yet in sight" (Goertz, 1988: 5). As well, he states that the "Mennonite entity justifies and verifies this peculiarity of a long, almost permanent crisis" (Goertz, 1988: 5).

Here, Goertz is idealizing a past that is different than both Redekop's and Kraybill's. He bemoans the loss of a true, separate, confessional identity, while also acknowledging the heterogeneity of Mennonites and calling for a more balanced historiography. While his sardonic tone adds slight reflexivity, in the end he reaffirms the need for a strong resurgence of " 'utopian energies' of the past" (Goertz, 1988: 11). Now, he seems to believe, is a time of embarrassment; where the Mennonites, as a collective, were once full of rebellious non-conforming vigour, now they have

> given up this kind of conformity, maintaining only a toothless anachronistic nonconformity. The Mennonites have made their accommodation with bourgeois, capitalist society. (Goertz, 1988: 11)

He continues diagnosing the crisis of contemporary Mennonites by stating that

> they have availed themselves of the opportunity to participate and profit from this system, without noticing the extent to which they have thereby come into contradiction to their confessional heritage. (Goertz, 1988: 11)

The perspective of contemporary Mennonites as predominantly upper-middle class, complacent and hence counter to the original vision of Anabaptism is a disavowal of the way they turned a profit and became petit bourgeois in Prussia and Russia – which indicates an ideological blindness to the way the past and present are read (see Redekop,

1989: 13-44). Why is this debate so heated and why is modernity to blame? Is it because the contemporary condition actually places identities into question? Or, are the categories of secular scholarship perpetuating a sense of a crisis?

Conclusions

To answer these questions I will turn again to trauma theory. In accordance with post-traumatic stress disorder, the actual trauma is that which is covered up, unknowable, unrepresentable yet visible through the use of language. Read this way, the scholarship that I have examined points to modernity as the condition through which these scholars inscribe a trauma, though in varying degrees, that needs to be fully acknowledged or witnessed to be able to 'work-through' it. The trauma becomes the work itself and, in its extreme, the perpetuation and creation of the traumas of the past by means of the literature of the present. What makes this salient is that this scholarship is also a strong means to Mennonite self-understanding, and has informed the concept of self for Mennonites since the writing of the *Martyr's Mirror*.[3]

The frameworks used by most of these scholars are, in the end, transvested ecclesiological categories. The modernity debate, it seems, is being used in the maintenance as well as the manufacturing of the confessional heritage. These frameworks contribute to the sense that resuscitation of the "Anabaptist vision" is needed quite

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[3]*The Martyr's Mirror* is an Anabaptist martyrology written by Thielemann J. Braght in 1660 in order to inform other Anabaptists of the suffering of the past and to reinforce the identity and solidarity of Anabaptists. It is still in print today and continues to fulfill its original purpose.

urgently, lest we come to demise under the "hammer of modernity" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). There is a lost object in this writing, and these ways of reading Mennonite life may prohibit routes through which these communities are continuing, both religiously and ethnically. Within this literature, Mennonite institutions are considered stable unchanging archives, used in the recollection and interpretation of the past and present, yet, as Stephen Warner suggests, we should start looking at how these institutions have become fluctuating systems that function as do other cultural entities; we should employ a model that allows a more 'wholistic' approach to examine how Mennonite identities can and do function within current cultures – from which they cannot be separated.

The veiled teleological element within this scholarship is an idealistic projective identification with varying Mennonite theological categories which finds its end within the idenitity-in-conflict debate, in which a binary stratification has precipitated. The split and binary stratification of the ethnic and religious components of Mennonite identities has been an effect of the desire for an articulation of a more homogenous Mennonite identity. It is the degree of importance which authors place upon this split and the resulting aporias that reveal the inadequacy of this dichotomy, its use in the reconstruction of Mennonite identities, and the ways they are interrogated. Even though the "construction of a mythical past can be, and often is, an important aspect of ethnic romanticism" which allows people to connect to a common heritage, when this is combined with the force of a formal, secular sociological enquiry this need has the possibility of limiting the form of knowledge available to both Mennonites and non-Mennonite scholars and lay-persons (Anderson,

1988: 199).

In this chapter I have suggested that the "manner in which the past is invoked is strongly indicative of the circumstances which make the past salient" (Winland, 1993: 119). At the same time and conversely, the circumstances which make the past salient are indicative of the manner in which it is invoked. In other words, while the function of history in groups is to provide a selective medium for transformation in the present, some of the literature that I have examined inhibits the availability of past experiences and perceptions. Rather, we should be looking to find ways to give voices to Mennonite history, listening to "the imperative to take responsibility for history" (Braun, 2001: 13), which might allow a broader range of historical expression and understanding of contemporary Mennonite identities because "the richer the historical fabric, the greater the potential for selection and reinterpretation" (Winland, 1993: 119).

Chapter 2

Mennonite Literature of Ambivalence and Resistance

> But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of a writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of "reality." The novelist may present his notion of this reality indirectly, that is to say, by figurative techniques, rather than directly, which is to say, by registering a series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extra-textual domain of occurrence or happening, as the historian claims to do. (White, 1976: 22)

Within every act of writing, there is a gathering together. There is a trace of memory, a subject-position instantiated at the very scene of writing. Current cultural theory has emphasized the fact that the archive of the author is necessarily being invoked within the material being discussed. This gathering together can also indicate, as I have examined in the previous chapter, that there is an inherent violence in this assemblage inasmuch as there is a necessary selective filtering of things within the history that allows it to be significant to different people at different times. In this chapter I would like to examine the differences in this gathering together between Mennonite literary criticism and the sociological/historical scholarship of the previous chapter. As in the sociological/historical scholarship that I examined in the previous chapter, the framework and the subject's temporal and spatial positioning will invariably affect the way in which Mennonite literary texts are read. If Mennonite literature is affected by the imaginary trauma that is circulated through historical and theological reconstructions for contemporary purposes, then one can suppose that literary criticism and literature will also portray the symptoms of this. Literary criticism and poetry will then bear the markings of

the ethic of the trauma discussed briefly earlier that brings the community and the literature into a positive relationship with 'the same' as well as with 'difference.' I will argue that the trauma examined in the previous chapter will come to represent itself in the implicit tensions between the Mennonite historical/sociological scholarship and Mennonite poetry and literary criticism. I will look to those assumptions within the predominant debates in literary criticism and Mennonite poetry that can be seen to be at odds with implicit assertions within the scholarship previously examined. I will argue that a predominant theme in Mennonite poetry and, consequently, literary criticism is the confrontation of difference. Significantly, it is not necessarily the difference and trauma of the outside that animates historical/sociological scholarship, but the differences that arise on the inside, within the boundaries of the various Mennonite experiences and discourses.

If a predominant concern in Mennonite historiography and sociology is ambivalence and the confrontation with the other, then it would seem to make sense that literary criticism would have congruent ways of reading these themes. The major debates and issues in literary criticism indicate a major preoccupation with the relationship between the author/artist and the community as well as the artist's potential relationship with structures of difference. The concern for literary scholars, as it was in some sociological scholarship, is the ongoing examination of the politics of identity as they pertain to issues of borders and their potential dissolution.

Mennonite literature often explores differing and conflicting perspectives on Mennonite identity. Since poetry is an individual expression of a belonging, the experiences that are recorded are invariably diverse. Julia Kasdorf is a Mennonite poet

who gives witness to difference within the boundaries of the Mennonite community in which she grew up. The poem "Vesta's Father" describes the father's abject existence that carried on past his death. This poem indicates the author's critique of the community's inability to deal properly with a figure who challenges the convictions of the group. Rather, Vesta's father is admonished for his transgressions, and in death is made an example of difference that appears from within the congregation.

> Mom's in the kitchen telling stories
> from before she was born, how Vesta figured
> if her father quit smoking, he'd save enough
> to buy new winter coats that she and her sisters
> would not be ashamed to hang in the anteroom
> of Locust Grove Mennonite Church,
> where the ladies couldn't help but smell smoke
> when the girls pressed around the mirror
> to jab pins in their buns and straighten prayer coverings.
> He drank, too. Deer season each year
> when he went with Hoot Owls to their camp
> on Black Mountain, someone always brought him home, drunk,
> to his wife, who had spells when she couldn't stop crying.
> The Bishop found out he wore a baseball cap
> and made him confess that worldliness
> to the whole congregation. And when he died,
> with whiskey on his night stand,
> he was buried by the Lutherans.
>
> Tears gleam on Mother's cheeks
> as she traces the grain in the table boards,
> but I am not weeping like his wife or daughters.
> The sins of the fathers won't be visited
> on my generation. I say there is no shame
> in lying among Lutherans where the folks are allowed
> to put flowers on the graves, his plot in plain view
> of those mountains that rise dark and silent
> as old Mennonites standing in pews –
> black-stockinged women on one side,
> black-suited men on the other –
> those mountains so high they slow the sunrise
> and hurry the night. (Kasdorf, 1992:5)

This poem speaks strongly about the boundaries that are used in the maintenance of a singular identity in relation to those that challenge them. What is emphasized is the binary construction of identity of this community — sinner/saved, Mennonite/Lutheran, men/women, sunrise/night. There is an ironic criticism of the Mennonite community in which she grew up within the validation of the father's difference: "I say there is no shame in lying among Lutherans." She legitimates and reverses the position of difference by granting a positive space to the father's resting place: "where the folks are allowed to put flowers on the graves, in plain view of those mountains." The author writes critically of the walls that are constructed with the image of Mennonites in the pews that shelter, like mountains, difference from entering the group. Critical and sympathetic themes such as these are prevalent among other Mennonite authors.

Patrick Friesen's poetry is marked by a sense of ambivalence towards his father and the religion of the enclavic and conservative small town of rural Manitoba where Friesen grew up. He writes very critically of the repression of his father and his father's god and the martyr complex of his mother. If ambivalence is, as Laplanche and Pontalis described it, the "simultaneous existence of contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings in the relationship to a single object — especially the existence of love and hate" (LaPlanche and Pontalis, 1973: 26), then this cycle of "pa poems" indicate this clearly. The theology depicted in this cycle of poems often runs against the grain of that supported by the scholarship studied in the previous chapter. The melancholic text of "pa poem 5: singing elijah" explores the sense of rejecting, or even abjecting the religion of his father, despite

the harm it would cause his father.

i wanted to tell you what i'm doing
at least be ready when you come around at night
i tried to remember what i was thinking or doing when you left
and you know not much has changed
what was true in 1971 is still true
nothing happens day to day does it? nothing new

yet some things need saying
we both knew i almost said the final thing
you wanted to stop your ears
but i never did say it not to you
it would have hurt you then
you would have thought the last days were upon us
but now i'm saying it
because you came to me and maybe it's what you want

jerusalem is dead stone dead sea dead
something old men dream
as they gaze in empty days

there's nothing new here
people have lived this desolation for years
there are not many of your kind a handful
who still believe as if 2000 years hadn't occurred
that's how it's supposed to work isn't it?
the crucifixion then and today and nothing between

you were a mystery man pa
lost in some kind of miracle
but you received the law
like everyone else you were found
and you thought your children must be found
uprooted into light

i can't speak for the others
almost don't have the heart to speak for myself
think of me as lost living
with one foot in the shade
trying to be true and double-crossing you every step of the way
it's something to live with (Friesen,1994: 26)

This poem speaks of the tragedy of the conflict between the father and the son and the attempt to work through and validate the author's current subject-position: "lost living / with one foot in the shade." The trauma of his father's death revisits the author: "at least be ready when you come around at night," and brings with it the broader contextual conflict which the author needs to bring to words: "but now i'm saying it / because you came to me and maybe it's what you want." The tension between the author's beliefs and mode of living and his father's more rigid Mennonite belief system seems to be mirrored in the tensions between the distinctions of what Anne Hostetler has termed "official" literatures, such as theological, historical, confessional and sociological scholarship, and "unofficial" literatures, such as poetry and other creative expressions (Hostetler, 1998).

The symmetry between writing, in the broad sense, and this poem can be seen in a few ways. The congruence lies in the dream of the father's traumatic appearance which is instantiated by something that has seemingly not been worked through – an incisive difference and ambivalence between the author and his father. This ambivalence is quite traumatic for the son because it prohibits a proper representation of their relationship and the issues that each had to deal with in the relationship. Similarly, the difference between poetry and literary criticism and sociological/historical scholarship will almost always be ambivalent – temporally, because there is always a difference between what has been stated about the subject and the subject in process. This difference between the father and son and their traumatic separation has effected a silencing of the past, or an inability to hear or speak of the difference. This traumatic separation however, revisits, as does the

father in the poem, much scholarship (as indicated by the identity-in-crisis debate in sociological/historical scholarship, and the binary debate in literary criticism) and poetry, in the attempt either to tame its difference or to represent these differences and tensions. This becomes the reason why the father comes back to haunt – to deal with the silences and misrepresentations, to make itself known that there is a trauma to be worked out.

This poem interestingly explores the tensions and conflict between what had been said (literatures of closure): "you were found," and the being said (open discourse): "but now I'm saying it / because you came to me and maybe it's what you want," and "think of me living one foot in the shade, trying to be true but double-crossing you every step of the way." The final line, "it's something to live with," can be read ambiguously through either the father or the son. Because of this ambiguity, this line enunciates the perpetual tension between the structures of difference in scholarship and literary criticism where it is the traumatic separation between them they both have to come to terms with. Perhaps, one reason why the identity-in-crisis debate was so conflicted was that it perpetually revisited the traumatic site that existed between identity as already stated ("official literature") and identity as a mechanism of production ("unofficial literature") in order to properly express this ambivalent relationship. That is, this tension between sociological/historical scholarship and literary criticism exists because there is an inherent conflict between scholarship as a literature of closure and the actual production of culture with poetry. This can be explored further by examining how authors in the literary criticism field has dealt with this traumatic ambivalence.

Literary Criticism and The Poet

In her essay "The Unofficial Voice: The Poetics of Cultural Identity and Contemporary US Mennonite Identity," Anne Hostetler quite systematically creates an argument that legitimates poetry as a relatively new, but strong, medium from which other Mennonites can obtain identity affirmation. Hostetler examines how poetry, as an "unofficial" literature, can portray nuanced and intricate elements of Mennonite identity that are not allowed representation in more official forms of identity affirmation such as theological and historical/sociological scholarship. She addresses the ethnicity-versus-religion debate within "official" scholarship by suggesting that Mennonite identity is inextricably bound to a varying mixture of religion and faith tenets and broader cultural and traditional forms. What is made explicit even in her title is that poetry is the true "unofficial voice" that exists critically in relation to other forms of Mennonite writing, presumably Mennonite scholarship.

If we look closely at the relationship between "official" literatures and "unofficial" literatures we find that there is not necessarily a true polar opposition that guides these two forms of writing. The question that could guide us here is how discourses of closure, or official identity formation, conflict with those discourses that allow identity to be open to change and contestation. Let me expand on this with a few examples that allow differentiation by degree. I have a good friend, Scott, who lives in Victoria where he had moved straight from his parents' house after he finished his undergraduate degree. This was to be a major change for him — he had lived at his parents' place until he had finished his studies and deeply felt the need to be challenged in different ways. Now that he is in a

different place than I am, I get to see him only once or twice a year and due to our busy working schedules we are not able to talk much on the phone. Nevertheless, our connection as good friends will seemingly always be strong, regardless of how much each of us has changed, or how much time has lapsed between meetings. When we do meet, though, the first few hours are always quite charged. It seems that for the first little while, we need to "butt heads," to stretch our previous conceptions of each other to position the person sitting before us as the same old person, but new nonetheless. The meeting of old friends, while always wonderful, can provide a fairly innocent example — that is if these differences don't lead to ideological battles — of the ways in which identity can struggle against even sympathetic appreciations of the subject. "Official" literatures may play a similar role in that scholarship is a stated construction of the subject, in which the general flux of every day life is reduced to a know-able object. While this seems to be a negative over-determination of scholarship, it does not negate the author's subject position, the amount of work and critical thought put into the object of study. Scholarship, as a statement, only requires further statements and confrontations with the object of study to reclaim differences over time and situation.

Another example at the other end of the political spectrum is the construction of homogenous communities through the official discourse of the group and, more specifically, the relationship of nations to their subjects. Canada, for instance, constructs the complicity of the people and the feeling of being Canadian through official discourses, even through the multicultural program that was apparently developed in relation to the furor of English Canada's relationship with its French counterpart (see Kamboureli, 2000:

131-174, and Bannerji, 2000). It can be argued that multiculturalism, itself the impetus for much of the productivity of Mennonite writing in Canada (Hildi Froese Tiessen has played an instrumental role in getting Mennonite literature beyond the boundaries of Mennonites. See Froese Tiessen, 1988, 1989, 1993), was created to smooth over differences that could potentially be threatening to the imagined Canadian nation-state (Anderson, 1991). The official discourse of multiculturalism, while allowing the representation of many different cultural voices, also assimilated the diversity of Canada by relegating those differences to easily consumed, but trivial, cultural stagings such as "Heritage Days." The re-writing of the history of Canada after multiculturalism indicates the tragic complacency of Canadians to the traumas of both immigration and diaspora as well as those differences that existed prior to the settler colony of Canada. This new history of Canada has effectively re-written First Nations Peoples' history not as a diverse history of their own but as one instance in a long line of immigrants in this "old" country of immigration (Dyer, 2001: 43-45). This form of conflict is summarized nicely by Stuart Hall in "Who Needs Identity": "the 'unities' which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, over-determined process of 'closure' " (Hall, 1996: 5). Similarly, Homi Bhabha writes about the nature of the conflict of cultural difference:

> The enunciation of cultural difference problematises the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how , in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic (Bhabha, 1994: 35).

In the first chapter, I examined how the problem of Mennonites in modern culture was exacerbated and recreated through the notion of tradition in contradistinction with modernity. The authority implicit within the statements of Mennonite scholarship itself was perpetuated by the varying historical theological precepts that were used to teleologically legitimate current Mennonite identities. Nevertheless, "official" literatures of Mennonite identity are clearly situated closer to the analogy of the meeting of old friends, where the people writing the history are active, sympathetic and critical participants in Mennonite congregations and institutions. The effect of an official discourse that writes, often conclusively, about historical and contemporary Mennonite issues is the conflict between the enunciated statement of scholars and the situational, positional identities in their full contingency. The example of the old friend can also indicate that the conflict is not a polar opposition, but exists because of different positions and intentions rather than opposing strategies of authoritative representation. This realization in itself could produce the urge to discover different ways of reading the function of the poet in Mennonite systems of representation. In the end, it is the examination of the tensions between life, experience and other forms of representation and critical work that needs to develop which creates the rich dialogue within scholarship that contributes to identity formations outside this writing.

Julia Kasdorf, in her essay "Bahktin, Boundaries and Bodies," has produced a very personalized, almost allegorical, critical response to the discussion of the role of the poet in the community and the poet's relationship to the Mennonite community. This essay is significant in that it blurs the boundaries between "official" discourse and "unofficial"

literatures since she is both a well-established poet and a scholar writing both to those in Mennonite worlds and to those outside. This then becomes a strong contribution to Mennonite cultural studies by drawing on the issues and thought of sociological/historical scholarship as well as literary criticism.

To reflect on the relationship of the artist to Mennonite communities she explores the metaphor of the physical body, where there is an inherent biological understanding in the creation of metaphors. Hence, the Mennonite community is a body, also considered the corporate body of Christ, and has similar issues of boundaries and borders as would our own physical bodies: "the physical experience of our own bodies shapes metaphoric ways of thinking, and that a culture's most important values will be aligned with the metaphorical structures of its fundamental concepts" (Kasdorf, 1998: 171-172). Kasdorf believes that Mennonites are a paradoxically embodied people; despite issues of repression and internal conformity, they can properly express themselves through cultural and spiritual traditions such as choral singing, quilting, poetry and art. While Hildi Froese Tiessen has critiqued this essay for its "naive" use of binary terms, maybe not enough credit is given to Kasdorf's own critical thoughts on how she has formulated the notion of the insider/outsider correlative pair (Froese Tiessen, 1998). To explicate her understanding of the issues of the borders of Mennonites she explores a dialogical model as something where, even though there is a creation of the self and the maintenance of the boundaries of this self, the self is in constant negotiation, disruption and recreation by others through language. Julia Kasdorf states that

> if we understand boundaries to be the limits that form all living, changing organisms, and if we honour them because they give aesthetic shape to our

> lives and the lives of the communities we inhabit, changes *will* occur...Those in the community who challenge its norms, (because of ethnic, gender, or sexual differences) would be valued as ones able to engage us in the conversations that help us determine the Body's shape - more than any writer of policy or theology. (Kasdorf, 1997: 188)

She challenges the official construction of the identity of Mennonites with the notion that identity is created through contestation and, as such, difference should be valued as a part of the identifying process, not as an excluding and exclusive example of what the body should define itself against. I believe the strength in this essay lies in her ability to assert by form and function what is done by content. That is, through the use of personal allegory, poetry and critical thought in this essay, she blurs the lines of insider and outsider, scholarship and literature, while at the same time allowing the expression of a belonging as a self-proclaimed critical Mennonite.

Binary Constructions and Boundary Destructions

Hildi Froese Tiessen addresses the issue of borders and boundaries through the perspective of post-colonial studies, drawing on the work of Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Iain Chambers, and using the theoretical notion of the Third Space, or the "in-between" space. She examines the creative work of authors, such as Jeff Gundy and Julia Kasdorf, who challenge the construction of Mennonite identity based on insider/outsider ways of thinking. The role of these writers in Froese Tiessen's article attest to the liminal and interstitial categories of Mennonite identities that are inevitably glossed over, ignored or looked down upon by other Mennonite scholars and community members and are thus "re-inscribing" Mennonite identity in terms of those shady areas of identity that fall

"beyond the binary." Froese Tiessen writes of the interstitial categories which inspires Mennonite writers that

> is not unlike the "in-between" space of which Bhabha speaks, the contingent, provisional space from which the occupant can apprehend the continual, ultimately arbitrary re-positioning or re-siting of the border itself. This is the place of cultural hybridity that "resists unitary paradigms and dualistic thinking," a place where transient, versatile, multiple and unstable boundaries of difference are "re-mapped" and "re-named." (Froese Tiessen, 1998: 20)

Froese Tiessen is one of the leading and original Mennonite literary scholars today. Significant insights in this article attest to her capacity to critique previous Mennonite literary analysis. She is the first of Mennonite literary critics to discuss at length the inability of the insider/outsider binary to properly signify current Mennonite identities and does a good job of exploring how this does not allow the expression of differing Mennonite voices for the sake of the monolithic "Mennonite Community" that pervades much Mennonite criticism. Since contemporary Mennonite poetry and creative writing explores spaces that other forms of writing negated, what is valorized in the end is the informal nature of poetry and, by implication, the writer's positions that can inform and affirm other Mennonites and non-Mennonites about the informal spaces that are not dealt with elsewhere. The views that she critiques most often place the author or artist in the periphery and, depending on the author, emphasize different ends of the polarity which contributes to and perpetuates the notion of the insider positioned against marginal Mennonites (see, admittedly ironically, her own essays and introductions, Froese Tiessen, 1988, 1989, 1992; Reimer 1993; Ruth, 1977, just to name the most prominent). In response to the closure and naturalization of the insider/outsider master narrative that has

developed because of the framework of literary criticism, poetry is a way to broaden the cultural knowledge of actual Mennonites' lives and to valorize the periphery in which most Mennonites exist. She implies in her article that the "trope" of the "unproblematised cultural identity"of the Mennonite community in a significant number of literary articles is perpetuated not only through the literature but through the nature of the form of this literature.

Froese Tiessens' Bhabha and Potential Logical Pitfalls

While her essay is strongly critical, broadening the theory base from which Mennonite scholars write, I would like to argue that Hildi Froese Tiessen does not bring the theory of the "Third Space" its full distance. Thus, in effect, she waters down some of the issues within Mennonite scholarship, literary criticism and cultural theory. In the end, her interpretation of Mennonite authors misrepresent their positions, for example Julia Kasdorf, and, as a paradoxical consequence, she reinforces the binary paradigm against which she argues by not bringing the issues to their logical conclusion.

The major problem with Froese Tiessen's use of post-colonial theory also inhibits other Mennonite literary criticism. That is, the focus of the major debates within other Mennonite literary scholarship echoes what Homi Bhabha has said about contemporary critical debates, where scholars "recognize that the problem of the cultural emerges at the significatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are (mis)read and signs are appropriated," but not necessarily 'how' cultural difference becomes (Bhabha, 1994: 34). Rather, by describing the points at which cultural meaning and boundaries dissolve,

Mennonite literary critics point to the symptom of what perpetuates the problem. They describe "the effect rather than the structure of the problem" (Bhabha 1994: 34). As well, when these scholars describe the effects within this literature – such as the binary bifurcations themselves – they often name the problem, explore it, and in the end valorize it without looking deeper into the structure that creates the problem and the polar thinking that is the effect. For example, Froese Tiessen aptly describes the polar thinking inherent within literary criticism, refutes it and offers a solution that only disperses the conflict; this is like taking aspirin for a headache and remaining in the place or continuing the activity that is creating an interior conflict that is the cause of the pain. In order to work out the conflict, one must try to explore the point at which the tension arises, or the factors that give rise to the tension. The question is then, how can authors examine this in a way so as to work through some of these significant issues?

Bhabha makes a distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference that can be of use here. He is working from a linguistic framework, or makes the assumption that culture, like a mind, is structured as language is, and hence can be read as a system of signs, signifiers, people who speak, and people who are silenced through other's speech. This, then, brings culture into the performative. Culture as a fluctuating system of meaning is always in a state of "enunciation" and reception. Bhabha distinguishes this from authoritative texts on culture, or literatures of closure which resembles the "utterance." He believes that artifacts of cultural diversity resist the active force of culture and thus are engaged in closure. Cultural difference, on the other hand, in line with linguistics, is the "enunciation" of culture that exists in the interplay and creation of

difference. More simply, cultural difference relates to that which is involved in the momentary production of culture, likened to a person that is talking – the enunciation. Cultural diversity relates to an object of study, likened to something that has already been stated – the utterance. Bhabha states:

> Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledge*able*', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity. (Bhabha, 1994: 34)

It is at the junction of cultural difference and cultural diversity where Bhabha creates the notion of the "Third Space", or the "in-between" space. It is not just, as Froese Tiessen argues, that liminal space from which artists write, but more than that, it is a space that not only eludes binary thinking, but actually ruptures from within binary thinking. Cultural diversity exists as authoritative texts on culture or an object of study, whereas cultural difference is the space that includes all the conditions of possibilities for the creation of culture. The interesting thing is that these two cannot be separated from each other – each co-exists with the other, disrupting and changing the other. It is these discursive conditions that allow engagement with the possibilities of change and mutation, the creation and recreation of signs and their signifiers; the "being said" changes the "has been said" and vice versa.

For example, if we place this distinction in a post-colonial language of colonizer and colonized where the power structure is muddled in the actual interplay of the two.

Who changes who in this exchange? Without denying the violence inherent in colonial rule, the signs and meaning of one cultural artifact become misinterpreted in the other's culture (which is where the violence enters) and vice versa; the meaning behind an individual sign is not transparent and becomes reinterpreted by the other culture into a sign slightly resembling the old one with a whole new discursive field determining its subsequent meanings. Therefore, the expected power coup – cultural diversity – is disrupted by the conflicting and changing systems of meaning – cultural difference – within and outside the two cultures. "It is this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent" (Bhabha, 1994: 36). This culture clash, while having the potential to be devastating and calamitous, also has the possibility to unintentionally allow for new systems of meaning to develop and reflexive change to occur.

To go back to a more linguistic frame, then, the previous post-colonial example will make more clear that when one speaks, what allows the production of meaning is not the one who speaks nor the one who receives what is spoken, but the entire gamut of discursive forces that determines both. It is this discursive in-between space, which is asymmetrical to the enunciation and the utterance, that situates each of the parties in different positions of time and space. The space of enunciation, Bhabha argues, places the authoritative address in an ambivalence, due to the temporal nature of symbolization – what has been said is always already a trace of itself and different from itself; what has been said is immediately disturbed by what is being said. It is here that the resistance to polarity exists, and the dissolution of the boundaries of each happens by disrupting the

authority of the other. The clash of discourse that creates new meaning is clarified by Bhabha:

> The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space which represents the general conditions of language, and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. (Bhabha, 1994: 36)

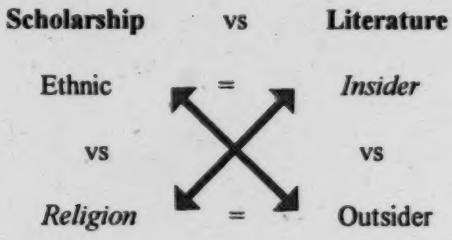
In other words, the relationship between the critical analysis and its text is one that is inherently complicated due to the process of writing which allows the text to be perpetually in dialogue with the difference of itself. This inherent ambivalence of writing and its constant disruption and change through the active force of culture is what resists the framing of Mennonite literature in terms of polar thinking. Since the cultural diversity of Mennonite scholarship and critical work is a part of the cultural difference of the creation of Mennonite culture, it would be hard to formulate them as opposed in a binary scheme. Rather, they exist closer to how Julia Kasdorf has conceived of these spaces as engaged in a complicated process of ambivalence and dialogue. While it may be adequate when Froese Tiessen formulates the "Third Space" as the place where the author speaks, it is her formulation of this space that implies the haunting presence of the binary since she does not address the traumatic production of this ambivalent position.

I would like to look at how the binary paradigm that polarizes poetry with its critical counterpart in scholarship and literary analysis would function in its extreme if a more critical view of the problem was not used. Here, I would like to look at how the issues and polarities in each field – Mennonite sociological/historical scholarship and Mennonite literary criticism misrepresent the other's issues *from which the conflict itself*

stems. That is, I have been arguing so far that the production of these binaries is the effect of the conflict between these two literatures and between the Mennonite culture in process. So, if we can find a point of connection between scholarship's and literary criticism's predominant debates it is the production of master narratives which conflict with each other. These polarities are not necessarily symmetrical; they are not the same polarities, even though they might at first appear to be. The master narrative in literary criticism is based upon the binary of insider/outsider and is somewhat incongruent with the polarity debate within sociological/historical scholarship. Potentially, though, if these were read as the same conflict, there could be great contradictions that arise from these asymmetrical meta-narratives. For if we place them together they exist contrary to each other since the correlative dualistic bifurcations, in the end, meet each other in their inverse. That is, the expression of the ethnic/religious dichotomy and what is privileged in scholarship is the opposite of the assumption that is elevated in the insider/outsider binary in literature and literary criticism. In scholarly writings, the religious quotient of Mennonite identity is elevated for the expression of history as an implicitly normative one. This binary comes into conflict with what is actually 'experienced' by authors.

The occurrence of these contradictions in the conflict between these literatures in turn informs each others' polarities and produces further incongruence. Since the religion versus ethnicity debate is carried on specifically in the scene of Mennonite scholarly writing, it may occlude and misrepresent the insider/outsider inverted counterpart that occurs in actuality. And conversely, the elevation of the insider in literature and literary criticism may not allow for a proper dialogue with scholarship to deal with some of the

issues it comes up with. We can place this dilemma in an illustration that may clarify some of the resulting confusion:



If we take, then, the predominant debates of these two forms of literature, strip them of their substantive clothing down to their metaphysical bones and place them in front of each other, we would have a messy skeletal mirrored reflection of each other. Yet this seems to get a bit limiting. If we examine the binary thinking that pervades both of these literatures and the polarity developed between these literatures, we reach an aporia: What do we do with this diagram of a confused imaginary? How can authors deal with this? Where does this contradiction come from?

Mennonite Poetry and The Rupture of Cultural Difference

Since the distinctions between all of these terms have significant complexities that would not actually allow them to be brought down to this level of abstraction and absurdity, we might need to focus on different ways of reading the phenomena of Mennonite cultural identities. This contradiction in itself reveals that these two literatures are approaching the object of study with different presuppositions that determine the outcome of what is said. For instance, since sociological/historical scholarship elevates the historical religious quotient of Mennonite identity, as I argued in the first chapter, we

might infer that these authors are implicitly concerned with how Mennonites will exist in relation to the modern world. Inversely, since literary criticism elevates the outsider quotient, where the author is able to tell us things about ourselves we might not recognize since we are sitting at the centre of the flux, these authors are more concerned with the positive space of difference and the resulting reflexivity that this space allows. Yet, this contradiction and its exploration can go nowhere without the recognition of the trauma that has generated it. This is why these debates become so tense. The microcosmic trauma that exists between the father of Patrick Friesen's "pa poem" and the son will perpetuate the trauma of their ambivalent separation until it is adequately represented and worked through. Similarly, the ambivalent trauma that polarizes literary criticism and sociological/historical scholarship is the same trauma that is perpetuated in historical/sociological scholarship; the tension and conflict is an effect of literary criticism's relation to structures of difference within poetry, of differing, unutterable conditions of possibility and scholarship's assumptions of modernity. It is this tension that indicates the perpetual negotiation of difference and the author's relation to it within scholarship and literary criticism; just as the heated discussion in scholarship indicates the need for a new model, so does literary criticism.

People such as Julia Kasdorf, Hildi Froese Tiessen, and Anne Hostetler have come a long way in "muddying" these distinctions that at their limit are unable to be worked through. They have effectively attempted to traverse the boundaries between scholarship and literature and have been able to draw from both to inform their models. Yet, and this is the paradox of existing in relation to others through language, the conflicts that seem to

clutter some of this literature remain somewhere lurking even behind the most valiant attempt to thwart them.

The place where we can read the difference and trauma of scholarship, historical and sociological as well as literary-critical, is also where there appears to be a congruence. If we look closely enough at those differences we find the points where these literatures actually become symmetrical. The points of congruence between these literatures is the rupture of difference within the boundaries of the group. It is the ambivalence indicated within the literature that threatens those discourses that project an impression of a strong, encapsulated and even "closed" identity. This difference, the voices that challenge, as happens at the macrocosmic level within literary criticism, are perpetually negotiated and, in the end, often graciously accommodated. It becomes, then, the challenge of "uncanniness," which is the gift of the author, to properly represent the conflict in one's own life as well as speak to the traumas that exist within language and the act of writing.

I would like to end this discussion with the poem "Another Life" by Jean Janzen. This can highlight the possibilities of the ambivalence of cultural difference, the "rupture" that is a part of every life and the language it describes.

> According to the broken life-line
> in my palm, I should have died by now.
> But if you look carefully, you would see
> a fine connecting line, like a fresh start.
>
> I think of the breaks that have healed,
> the bone's new joining, the skin's
> tough, smooth seam. And of my friend Gloria
> with the harelip, the soft consonants
> of her fifth grade wisdom as she points
> to my belly: there is the line where
> the doctor cuts for the baby. Gloria, adopted,

who ran away, the wind in her open wounds.

Sometimes only rupture allows breath -
the intubation, the slit of childbirth.
But what of the palsied newborn, or
the friend who emerges without speech?
When endurance is only a dangling thread?

I open my palms and see they hold
nothing but air, my lifeline.
Survival as light as that. The gratitude
for each breath, its tenacity, how I cling
as it swings me to the other side. (Janzen, 1995: 53)

The difference between the enunciation of Mennonite discourses and culture and its critical utterance is mirrored in the rupture that Janzen speaks of which is at once potentially traumatic: "palsied newborn, or / the friend who emerges without speech," and at the same time one that has the potential to be creative, that would allow for dialogue and discussion. The rupture that exists between these literatures and the language that describes it marks the texts like a scar with the knowledge that this literature has grown and changed and allowed difference to be born from within.

Chapter 3

Identification, Theory and Difference

In the previous chapter I examined an implicit tension between two major Mennonite critical discourses – Mennonite historical/sociological scholarship and literary criticism. I examined how the trauma of modernity that was perpetuated through the frameworks from which the authors worked made itself evident in an implicit conflict with literary criticism. Since Mennonite literary criticism is concerned with the construction of cultural identities as is sociological/historical scholarship, it would seem to make sense that they would have congruent assumptions from which to read these identities. Surprisingly though, they conflict with each other. I argued that this conflict has not been properly represented and thus will continue to reappear within both literatures and resemble something of a traumatic remembrance. This traumatic remembrance in sociological/historical scholarship will continue in the identity-in-conflict debate, where authors are struggling for a coherent statement on Mennonite identity for the past, present and future. In literary criticism, this reappearance will continue in the form of the binary debate, where authors attempt to deal with the tension by dispersing the effects of it.

I suggested that one way to look at the foundations of this problem is to employ a reading of Homi Bhabha's Third Space, which offers a strong tool to break down the inherent conflict in the writing of culture. My conclusions at the end of each chapter point to the need to formulate different assumptions on identity to allow for a proper representation of the traumas that lie at the heart of this literature, culture and, in the end,

the process of identification and affiliation. In this chapter I would like to bring the trauma theory and the Third Space into dialogue with each other in the attempt to bring to light a new theoretical assumption about identity that could help to work through some of the conflicts that were discussed in the first two chapters. This will highlight the ambivalent and traumatic production of identities that needs to be properly represented in scholarship and literary criticism to valorize different Mennonite identities.

With a reading of Patrick Friesen's poem, *The Shunning*, I will explore a notion of the construction of identity that can exemplify how individuals come to inhabit the spaces that they have. This reading will uncover an inherent alterity and ambivalence within the construction of the individual as well as within a group. This difference within the subject can destabilize boundaries that are thought to be strong and encapsulating, at the same revealing the ultimate transparency of these borders to what lies beyond them. The shunning of the main character, Peter, will highlight theory on the abject in relation to the "fictive unity" of the subject. I will argue that the logic of difference and exclusion that can be highlighted with this action, while essential to an imaginative whole, cannot be the predominant force of identity construction as we should see with the rest of the characters in the narrative poem. Psychoanalytic theory will be able to provide an interesting and persuasive account of how the subject comes to be through a positive relation to difference and otherness. To explore this further I will introduce some thoughts on the concept of contingency that goes beyond the textbook definition. The lives of Helene, Johann and even Peter will exemplify a form of contingency that is both accidental and positional, and that carries with it the weight of a trauma and a belonging.

Exclusion and the Urgency of Difference

The Shunning is a narrative poem that portrays a turn of the century (1914) seemingly enclavic rural southern Manitoba Mennonite community (unless stated otherwise, quotes of poetry that follow are from Friesen, 1978). This group of Mennonites is most likely from the Dutch-Russian-Prussian emigration to Canada from Russia between 1873 and 1884, it tended to be of the more conservative Anabaptist stock (Dyck, 1993: 195-213). These groups were essentially allowed to maintain their group structure and culture that was developed through centuries of segregation and separation in Prussia and Russia through the block settlement program in Canada. J. Winfield Fretz, an American Mennonite sociologist, believes that the reason Mennonite culture survived in Canada was "largely due to the fact that they were allowed to settle in solid communities" (quoted in Regehr, 1996: 1).

The strictness of the boundaries that enclose this community are quite evident from the beginning of the poem. Early within the scroll of diary entries and poetic monologues Peter is shunned by the entire community, including his wife. He is excluded from the community, not geographically, but relationally, in order to bring him back within the folds of the Mennonite community. This signifies the group's intolerance of the actions and thought professed by Peter. We are slowly allowed access to the reasons for this exclusion. Helene writes, "I never had any reason to doubt his love for me, but I didn't understand some of his ideas. He said there couldn't be such a place as hell, not with a loving God. That's what started all the trouble with the church" (30). This assertion indicates that the main reason for his shunning is theological and that his views are in

tension with the church's. Peter has been confronted several times by Reverend Loewen and the elders and there appear to have been rumours about his pride and arrogance.

The constructions of borders through exclusion are often quite violent – and we see this fairly early in the poem – since a major preoccupation of the poem is with the broader violence of the shunning and its effects on the rest of the community through a long period of time. Peter's wife Helen writes:

> Of course he got worse when people stopped coming to get eggs. The eggs we couldn't use Peter threw on a pile beside the hen house. One morning he slaughtered all the hens. I don't want to say how he did it. I never knew people could do things like that. He hardly ever spoke to me anymore. We got farther apart. I wanted him, but I thought he was wrong. I thought he was wrong. And I did not want to lose my faith. My Christ. (15)

As well, Peter is painfully brought back to feelings he had before the shunning:

> I kneel to ease my belly's pain
> strike my head on the floor
> remembering her bare arms around me
> how I went lost there
> helpless as a baby
> and I woke a man again
>
> forever her flesh
> and now winter
> and memories can kill (34)

The ensuing confusion, frustration, guilt and shame lead Peter ultimately to the limits of meaning within the community and he commits suicide.

The act of shunning, while being a part of the historical practice of Mennonites, is always already present within its identity. It has been a point of theological debate ever since the beginning of Anabaptist-Mennonitism in the sixteenth century. It is an essential

part of two significant doctrines of Mennonite confession, and has become almost specific to Anabaptists themselves and the various groups stemming from Anabaptists, such as the Amish, Hutterite, Old Order Mennonites, and so on. The Schleitheim confession of 1527 reads:

> We have been united as follows concerning the ban. The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk after [Him] in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently taken. The same [shall] be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18). (Yoder, 1979: article II)

This contentious issue also has led to many different interpretations resulting in further excommunication, church discipline and even major schisms within the many Anabaptist groups. Shunning practice was nevertheless reinforced in 1632 in the Dortrecht confession, and, in lesser degrees, in subsequent confessions of faith (Redekop, 1989: 217). Surprisingly, there is a distinct lack of research done on this topic (besides in its historical origins), but what there is suggests that shunning and, more broadly, church discipline, became increasingly rare and only practised by the most conservative groups throughout this century (Bender, 1953; Neff; Redekop, 1989: 280-295). Nevertheless, church discipline of this sort has created and, at the same time, been an effect of the fear of difference that has served to structure the group's boundaries.

Those who are shunned and hence abject to the community are both paternally admonished to change their ways and made an example of difference within the community. Kristeva postulates that the abject cannot ever be fully rejected and forgotten;

rather, the abject always exists as a threat to one's subjectivity since it is as much a part of an individual as it is within the symbolic. It draws us to the border between death and meaning, and we must reject it for an impression of a stable identity. She states in *Powers of Horror* that "the abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I" (Kristeva, 1982: 1). When individual identity is grounded solely within the roots of the community, shunning represents a negative relationship with the hegemony of the community that can only end in exclusion and non-meaning. Machiel Karskens defines the logic of privation as a binary relationship whereby only the positive term can provide the relationship with content. The positive term must be a property that the subject ought to have but does not necessarily possess (Karskens, 1991: 78-79). In this case, only the return to the Mennonite community can fill with value the void of the one that is shunned. It becomes the site of identity that cannot represent or give meaning to its suffering except by the gathering together of the ideals of the community, and the incorporation of the language of the group. In essence, it requires a sacrifice.

To explore this form of difference further, Foucault's studies of the asylum, the clinic and the prison have explored how the modern individual is historically constructed by ritual forms of exclusion that create systems of discourse and their proximate other. Foucault's ultimate goal was to create an awareness of the structures that have served to create the modern individual and difference among us that is perpetually threatening. At the same time, this complex chain of fear of alterity has served to limit us. It is these forms of subtle directives which can point to the modern individual within a historical, discursive setting and the subsequent forms of discourse, technologies and methods of control and

manipulation that give rise to this person (Bernauer 1987; Carette, 2000; the introduction of 1999; Chidester 1986).

This form of difference as inherently exclusive is well developed in Foucault's writings. For Foucault, difference that exists in the liminal spaces of society needs to remain marginalised and hidden to help in the maintenance of the hegemonic order. This form of difference is inherently laced within a discursive field of power relations. Even though power is involved with the control and direction of individuals, it is not overtly coercive. Rather, power is embedded and dispersed within a field of social relations that is hidden and powerful, that produces certain pressures within the individual indistinguishably intertwined with subtle and overt disciplinary techniques. In this sense, power is a positive force that ultimately creates a symbolic universe of discourses and knowledge in which individuals act. In *Madness and Civilization,* he describes the necessary bifurcation of the difference between reason and unreason that resulted in the Classical period. Through scientific, medical and objective means, this enclosure, as a powerful institution, created a discourse about individuals meant to manipulate and control subjects. This institution succeeded in "terminating the dialogue with unreason and confining its language to silence" (Chidester, 1986: 2). Accordingly, the other always exists because of power relations. Karskens states that Foucault's notion of power as an approach that

> describes the emergence of social phenomena out of the (social) practices and their mutations as a network of power relations. Power in general must be described as an organized set of actions restricting the field of actions of other actors; in the process it always tries to cope with differences by reducing them. Thence, exclusion can be seen as one of the tactics of power, among other political tactics such as normalization, persuasion and political tactics such as killing, submissions, confinement, correction, discipline, normalization, persuasion and so on. (Karskens, 1991: 88)

Thus, difference and exclusion arise out of social and political rituals that limit the conditions of possibilities; these discourses then serve to limit knowledge otherwise available. Here we see the germs for a theory that can elucidate the nature of power within the social arena, including how the boundaries portrayed in the rural Mennonite community of *The Shunning* function.

Yet, Foucault's notions of difference have some inherent complications that would need to be examined. His notion of difference inherently assumes that all differences necessarily entail a logic of exclusion. For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault implies that the cosmology of Christianity, as opposed to the modern mind frame, necessarily challenges the binary of reason and unreason through the inclusion of good and evil. This is something that we witness in our everyday existence – people and situations are not inherently bad or good. Similarly within Christian theology and the Renaissance there exists a unity, though tragic, between good and evil, since God is the fundamental guarantor of reality. In the Classical period things begin to change. Reason and unreason become ideological, as well as linguistic, binary opposites, and exist within the logic of privation of which exclusion must be apart. Reason and unreason become conceived of in terms of presence and absence where reason is perceived as the essential real property of people, its absence and unreason, is something to be excluded, confined and changed if only by death (Karskens, 1991).

The strategy that Foucault used within *Madness and Civilization* can be extremely useful in analysing issues of power and liberation, but has shortcomings that Karskens discusses. For instance, Foucault's notion of difference, intricately interrelated with power

relations that are privative in nature, may lead to the interpretation of identities as inherently dualistic. This is exemplified by the need of the excluded and different group to feel the necessity to prove the congruity between the two groups thus exalting the other group's traits and depreciating its own qualities. Another problem is that it may lead the named group to a sort of mimesis – the different individual can still feign the qualities of the normative group. This act of liberation could also lead to a reversal in values, where the excluded individual defines himself negatively in relation to the excluding party without investing positive value in the resulting difference (Karskens, 1991: 87).

Jonathan Z. Smith, in his lecture "Differential Equations: On the Construction of the Other," approaches difference and otherness in way that is different from both Foucault and Karskens. Coming from an anthropological or social-scientific framework, Smith discusses at length some of the questions on difference that Karskens raises. Whereas with Foucault difference is dealt with through powerful discursive means that create subjects through subtle mechanisms of control and manipulation, Smith approaches difference as a social structuring mechanism that can be viewed positively and not polarized. For Smith, otherness is inherent in the social arena, and is not essentially laced with power dynamics. Smith's formulation of otherness allows us to discuss alterity as both something violent and coercive as Foucault insightfully stated, as well as to examine otherness as something that can create reflexive change. While Smith does not directly address Foucault in his writings, he does discuss what he sees as the prevalent models of otherness employed in social and cultural discourse as problematic by their own definition (Smith, 1992: 2). These models include metonymical, topographical and linguistic and/or

intellectual/intelligible "differential equations." Within these models Smith describes the processes of exclusion and difference as intrinsic to the nature of social systems. They exist as fluctuating, reflexive modes of relatedness within one's own culture and with those that lie outside of it.

Smith's first model, the metonymical model, describes how one group distinguishes itself from another by the explicit activity of naming. Generally this is shown by the exaltation of a familiar cultural trait or a physical mark or appearance that sets one group apart from another. In other words, difference or otherness is constituted by the noticeable absence of a certain feature that then serves as a reference for the one group to label the other. This, Smith recognizes, is not simply a rhetorical device for stereotyping the group as a whole by means of one of its features, but can be seen as a complicated structure that serves as a point for "reciprocal determination" (Smith, 1992: 2). That is, the act of naming in the metonymical model of difference can serve as a reference point for a reflexive and mutable identity. This is what Smith calls a double metonymy: while the appellation serves to mark difference and discontinuity, this form of naming can conversely inspire reciprocal patterns. In another way, this mark of difference does not have to indicate master/slave binaries, but can also indicate the naming group's vulnerabilities and ambiguities, the other within, and can help to reshape its own sense of self and identity. That is, the act of naming the other is a complicated process "by which societies explore their internal ambiguities and interstices, experiment with alternative values...and question their own structures and mechanisms" (W.S. Green quoted in Smith, 1992: 3). In relation to *The Shunning*, Peter, while being an example of difference within the group's

boundaries and pedagogically excluded, also forced the community to examine the values by which they defined themselves, even if there was no immediate indication of change.

The topographical model implies the notion of centre and periphery. For example, in pre-modern times, difference was ascribed to those that fell outside the boundaries of a King's jurisdiction. This form of difference usually becomes metaphorical, such as the distinction between savage and civilized: those that live in a city and those which symbolize the opposite of what it means to live in a city: reason, cultured, etc. By abstracting it to the level of metaphor, this can come to designate the other within one's own geographical boundaries as well as outside of it. At the same time this dualism can be seen positively, where the symbol of city life can come to mean that which is corrupt, nasty and shrewd, and those that live outside urban centres are seen as untainted by the indecency and crudeness of city dwellers.

The third model for Smith, linguistic and intellectual otherness, is also the most problematic since this is the only one that is examined in current cultural theory. This model is made most obvious where linguistic barriers constitute difference. The complexities come into play when fundamental linguistic or intelligible misunderstandings are encountered. Misunderstanding can become a strong locus for a disparate relationship. Smith describes the ability to label the linguistically foreign individual or group as opaque, or dualistically as non-human. In this sense the geographical metaphor, "barbarian," can also reduce the ethnic other to a transparency whereby the silence (or unintelligibility) of the one becomes the speech for the other. This can be made more obvious with an example of a different sort of linguistic other – that of the historical other. Smith describes

early humanist historiography as exemplifying the inaccessibility of the past: Petrarch was extremely critical of being able to understand the past and voiced his skepticism of returning to the idyllic state of ancient Greece (Smith, 1992: 8). As well, nineteenth century discourse further silenced the ancestral other with the use of traditional, non-Western cultures as the model for the past, in effect, speaking both for the tribal culture being studied and the ancient history of humanity to which the tribal culture is supposed to be comparable.

While this reading of Smith in relation to Foucault's formulation of difference has the possibility of watering down the potency of Foucault's theses, I would argue that Smith's formulation of otherness is an adequate contribution to the alterity debate and is helpful in examining the issues that Karskens raises. Smith helps us to understand and read identities by pointing out that not all differences are necessarily power laced, or that "exclusion is not the overall mechanism responsible for all types of oppositions or conflicts" (Karskens, 1991:89). Rather, as we see in our everyday lives and with a more detailed reading of Patrick Friesen's poem, identity, while being an effect of discursive forces, is also a certain position, a belonging, that can allow the individual to move with agency within the various positions and relationships to structures of difference s/he inhabits at a particular point.

Re-situating Difference

I would like to turn back to *The Shunning* for a reading of identity beyond the exclusive. Peter then becomes not only the excluded party, but also a subject invested

with positive value. Brought to the limits of the community, to the edges of liminality itself, unable to sacrifice his subject for the community, Peter in turn commits suicide. There is an absence of meaning in his abject state, that is created through the denial of understanding by his community of reference, and besides the sacrifice of his subject, he must exercise the only action that is left to him within the enclavic community. Without occluding the positive quality of his own sense of subject and identity, he rejects the negative category that has been placed upon him. He essentially denies the truth of the community of which he is made representative. In the end, he does not die for the community, but for himself, sacrificing himself to himself, into the unknown category beyond the possibilities of signification for both the community and for the space of difference. This act then becomes both melancholic and transgressive, an exercise both in a true and amputated situated-ness and the positive play of otherness. In a perpetual, cyclical acting-out of the trauma of this act, Friesen writes at the scene of Peter's death:

> a silver fall water
> fall arcing aching
> cock crow
>
> singing the hollow
>
> hallow
> the hollow singing
>
> still
> in that cold face
> singing yes yes yes
> singing still
> at cock crow
> at caught cock crow
> in the face of
>
> no god

know (44)

Indeed, the lower cased "god" in this selection seems to represent a desacralized God and can be read within an evacuation of meaning, such as this abject suicide. In the space that he inhabits before he dies, he is confronted with the knowledge of the boundaries and the truth of the community. At the same time, his position within the community is situated contingently within history. Peter is only allowed a space in the structure of meaning presented to him, and his strong ambivalence toward this structure alienated him through his own subject-position and intention as well as through the corrective actions of the community. This subject as an object of fear becomes violated through a kind of "misrecognition" a position that situated him at a point of misunderstanding with the community, a relationship that is based on the excessive production of his self and ideas by the community. This misrecognition is exemplified in the scene with Loewen where Peter is being shunned. Here Peter speaks and is not adequately heard either by the pastor or his wife Helene. The first quote is what he actually says as he walks past Reverend Loewen after their discussion:

all this light he said
all this cold cold light (39)

This phrase signifies both his frustration with the discipline that has been imposed upon him by the church and his position of ambivalence towards the church. What is actually belatedly heard by Loewen is shown a page earlier:

then Loewen remembered peter said that he was cold (38)

In Jonathan Z. Smith's words, Helene then brings this intellectual or linguistic

misunderstanding further:

> all I heard was something about light. All the light, too much light, or something like that. (40)

These misunderstandings become formative of the direction for both Peter and Helene. Stuart Hall describes how ideological misunderstandings such as these are inevitable since "[i]dentities are...the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack,' across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes that formed them" (Hall, 1996: 6). That is, Peter's shunning and suicide are an effect of the space between the ideals of the community and the position of Peter in relation to those ideals and the resulting inability to properly recognize Peter within the reaches and understanding of the community that led to his shunning, alienation and eventual suicide.

As well, Helene's identity is formed almost accidentally. While she participated in Peter's shunning, his suicide, including the excess, or misrecognition, of his suicide, becomes instrumental both in her imaginative relation with the community and in her thoughts of herself. The various identifications that Helene seems to go through has more or less positioned her in the end to become distant from the broader community. She writes:

> When he died something changed. They tried to comfort me by saying I had done what was best, that I had done the best I could for him. But very quickly they avoided me. Fewer and fewer women talked to me or, if they did only in passing and about other things. They still said I had done God's will, but now I think they feared me. I sometimes felt like a witch.(49)

Her narrated self and her feeling of belonging to the community exist in an imaginary space as she is forced to change her position within the community. She becomes resolved that her present position has become similar to Peter's position, though many years later. Her imaginative connection to or identification with Peter is contingently re-established across an expanse of time and space with her feelings that she is not of this world. She says:

> And I lived in shame for many years. Maybe still. A shame that I had not behaved in a truly Christian way, in a human way, and that Peter had known and despaired for me. ...I often thought Peter was not for this world. It could be that neither of us was. Though I am still here. (51)

This can reaffirm the sentiment identified by Lawrence Grossberg that "identifications, and affiliations, rather than identities, are ways of belonging. They define us spatially in relation to others, as entangled and separated" (Grossberg, 1996: 101). With Helene's changing identifications, Peter's position as the negative category of difference is also changed. She recognizes, in Grossberg's terms, that "the other exists, in its own place, as what it is" (Grossberg, 1996: 94). With her connection to Peter in the end, the negative space of exclusion that led Peter to his death is changed to create a space of otherness, a positive category that she feels she has come to inhabit. And as such, this text places difference within history, as well as through positions since it is only through her current position, distant from the community that she is enabled to reconnect to Peter. The second section in the poem presents the reader with another trauma, this time constituted by the chronological structure of the poem. The monologues in the second section straddle a time in Mennonite history that points to modernization and increased

urbanization, with the resulting confusion in the older people and the potential amnesia in their children. Regehr characterizes this point – the time before and after the World Wars – as one of great transition, which Mennonites resisted as long as they could. This could indicate the potential for confusion in the greatness of changes that had taken place between these two periods. In 1939, 86.9 percent of Canadian Mennonites were rural and agricultural people living in small farming towns and villages. By 1971, fewer than 30 percent of Canadian Mennonites remained in farming communities, 47 percent had moved to the cities and 23 percent were in non-farming rural communities (Regehr, 1996: 1-31). The confusion over the potential loss and death of culture and memory is indicated by the historian in *The Shunning*, most likely Klaas, Anna's father-in-law:

> do you understand?
>
> these are my memories father's
> his mother's maybe her mother father
> their friends their neighbours
>
> here in the brush by this creek where the limat flows
> an overgrown orchard near poltava
> or a wharf smelling of fish
>
> do you understand this? where we came from?
> it all adds up
> figure it out for yourself (89)

The ruminations of the Mennonite experience in Russia, with Klaas' own rememberings, are placed in relation to the time in which they are uttered. This is an imperative, a call to an ethical relation to the past that is roused by an old man in the face of the dissolution of his culture. While this small bit of history is different in time and space, quite removed from the place in which it had been uttered, indicating an inherent

ambivalence, this difference is somehow bridged, made continual with the notion of tradition and memory. The memory that becomes transcribed into history is also exemplified by the change of subject in this poem. The memory that becomes transcribed into history is indicated by the "I" that becomes a "we." The trauma of the Russian experience as well as its proximity in time makes salient the need for its remembering, the notion of a "living memory", and the subject's affiliations that are currently threatened. Here, there is a trauma that calls the subject to the historical other. In Chapter one I examined how the past is constantly under negotiation and, more specifically, the theological category of trauma where the group's past is made congruent with contemporary ideological struggles. The beckoning that is part of the literature that I have examined is indeed indicative of the need of situating oneself in relation to the past simultaneously arising with the salience of examining how one engages with it.

Contingency, Psychoanalysis and Others

I would now like to think a bit harder about contingency, both in relation to this poem, but also in relation to contemporary notions of identity formation. The word contingency will be able to explicate a notion of identity – as not closed, but relatively undetermined – that challenges the master narrative of exclusion. If we look at the word itself, dig into its past, its etymological derivatives suggest a joining of two separate words having similar but not entirely congruent meanings. It is formed from the Latin *con* meaning "with, together," but also "boundary" and *tangere* – or tangent, meaning "two lines meeting at a point without intersecting." There is an interesting joining with these

two words that will take them beyond the individual spaces they hold within a symbolic system. These two words syncretize through their joining, and possibly in the joint itself that allows the two words, *con* and *tangere*, to become other than what they had initially been. *Con*, meaning with and together seems to carry the sense of a belonging within the new word. *Tangere* as the meeting of two lines without intersecting creates the sense of a break, a joint, an ambivalence and a violence. These are paradoxically bound to create a meaning that has all of these meanings. The binding together in contingency transforms its meaning and brings it past the possibilities of the two separate words. What becomes pivotal in this excessive production seems to be the point at which these two words meet. This creates the conditions necessary for the possibilities of the transpiring connotations of contingency as accident, emergency, crisis as well as potentiality and dependency. More succinctly, contingency is allowed a space to reach the other beyond its own boundaries and always carry with it the inflections of all that it has come to mean because of the difference between the two words and the resulting trauma within. There is built into the word itself an ambivalence. Contingency itself is contingent since there is a trauma within the word that brings it into its unique situated-ness, or to its subsequent meanings. This is the excess of contingency: because of its difference within there is a belonging. My reading of Patrick Friesen's poem *The Shunning* has shown the difference within through what it expels – the act of the shunning itself– but has also shown the possibility of a unique belonging that positions the characters "contingently" within time and space. The psychoanalytic construction of the subject, from which a good deal of contemporary criticism has drawn in various forms, will be able to reinforce this conception of

contingency and bring it into the realm of identity. Here we will be able to find a theory of identification that, as Hall states, is situated within our imaginative capacities (Hall, 1996: 3). It is also in this space where we find the ingredients for a theory on the ambivalent production of our affiliations, stemming from the Oedipal dilemma, wherein the parents are both objects of love and resentment, our ideals and our rivals. At the base of our subjectivity in psychoanalysis is a trauma, a split that allows and challenges the formation of identity.

Freud writes in "Mourning and Melancholy" that the arrival of identification lies in the experience of a traumatic loss. All the subject's subsequent relationships become attempts at dealing with the incident. For Freud, it is the loss of the other (in the broad sense), that serves to enmesh the subject's desires and drives for the re-cathexis of the object that was lost (Freud, 1915: 246-250). In other words, it is not necessarily the object itself that is mourned, but the psychic and economic connection with the other that needs to be dealt with. The subject consequently develops a strong intolerance for object loss that manifests itself as an incommunicable sadness and a retardation of psychomotor activities (Freud, 1915: 245). For Freud there is a connection between mourning and melancholy that issues a sort of ambiguity that Kristeva develops in *Black Sun* – that melancholia may be a part of mourning, but can, through a displacement and excessive attachment to it as an object, preclude the ability to work-through. Kristeva talks about the state of melancholia as "an institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia" (Kristeva, 1989: 9), a place where the individual is trapped within the affect and is unable to bring it into representation or even have the knowledge of what is actually at play.

Language, then, loses the ability to effectively represent the desires, drives and affects of the individual, while ostensibly showing a mastery of signs. To effectively work-through melancholy, then, in Kristeva's mind, re-cathexis to language is necessary; one must go back to the site of non-meaning, establish the "presence" of the lost object and give suffering a language to effectively mourn what had been lost.

For Kristeva the individual must go through a traumatic separation from the mother, both literally and figuratively, in order to find its way into the world that is different from the subject. In order to embrace the symbolic, and hence language and rules, a foundational break needs to be made with the maternal symbiosis. For the proper entry into the symbolic the child must fully accept the function of language for the expression of both desire and an identity separate from the mother (Kristeva, 1989: 1-30). There is here, from the beginning, an ambivalent trauma that instantiates the individual as a subject in relation with others. For both Freud and Kristeva relationships outside of the individual are created through language and imagination for the recovery of the foundational trauma. Hence, Diana Fuss states that "identification is only possible traumatically. Trauma is another name for identification, the name we might give to the irrecoverable loss of a sense of human relatedness" (Fuss, 1995: 40).

Whether or not we accept the psychoanalytic definition of identification, I would argue that the formation of identity and its affiliations are not only products of an interiority, but also find their impetus in what lies outside the individual. *The Shunning* shows the ambivalent production of subject-positions at once formed through difference and fear as well as through connections with others across time and space. As can be

shown through the characters of *The Shunning*, and in working through the theoretical literature, contingency is not just an accidental force. It is identity that is formed through a trauma, as Diana Fuss clearly states. This trauma at the heart of the subject is one that brings it into contact with others outside its changing boundaries, since this is what allows identification to begin. With the separated Mennonite community of rural Manitoba, the fear of difference is what structured its boundaries and justified its way of life. The difference that could not be repressed, Peter, became pedagogically excluded. This exclusion became the truth of the community – making more visible and transparent the borders that kept them. Yet, a contingent subject is formed not only through the exclusion and difference that Foucault conceived of, but also through a unique position in space and time, a positive relation to difference that, as Jonathan Z. Smith wrote, allows for "reciprocal determination." This is a belonging similar to the one Grossberg has developed, that brought Helene back to Peter after his death, through an experience of otherness, a spatial positioning that also becomes imaginative.

This sense of otherness and spatial positioning as formulated above is nicely defined in a poem by Jean Janzen. She writes of difference as not necessarily oppositional, existing in a binary relation with the same, but as a kind of co-operative difference necessary for perspective on that which is same. With the difference that Janzen discusses in her poem "The Mountain," there are subtle intricacies that constitute the relationship to the same; The other creates a longing and a desire that informs the same, the valley as home has a greater significance in the face of the mountains. In "The Mountain" she juxtaposes the valley where she resides and the surrounding mountains as a metaphor for speaking about

difference. This difference, for Janzen, is needed not only to keep perspective on that which is the same, it is also there as something that is both frightening and alluring.

From their cool, shaded rooms
We carried our children into the sun's glare,
past the burned hills,
and into the immense canyon.

We lifted them, pointing.
The river roared, battering
and shining in its swiftness,
and the walls it had made through

millennia stood taller than the world.
This is home, we said,
but they couldn't hear us.
Not until we carried them

back into their safe beds
did our voices enter them again.
Sleep, we whispered,
and stepped back into
our own solitudes, spaces
that couldn't hold us now,
but vibrated without end.

In spring the first slopes
are lacy with snowdrops, lupine, and fiddleneck
in a wild band of curve and curl –
the whole field bending
to lure us up into the mountain's
huge embrace, up to the silence
of a meadow's chilled nightfall,
the sudden precipice, and its white peak
like the *Sanctus*, overhead.
Over its granite lap, the mountain
has made a bed for us all,
pine fragrant with dew gathering
for our lips, a place we had only
imagined until we entered like a child.
For the mountain calls the child,
the one who awakens early, who hears
the small sounds of seekers beside the streams.

In the silence of dawn, the rustled of leaves
where the chickaroo leaps, the cracking
of seeds, the jay's blue streak.
No one sees him turn his back to the campground;
he doesn't hesitate, but follows
the source, pumping his arms in a run
before he pauses to turn back, and discovers his way.

Where is home?
Is it the magma cooled and lifted,
the rocky ledge where poppies cling,

the roaring river cutting in,
and the peak with its icy distance
and sustenance?

Or is it our ancient valley seabed
which the valley feeds,
where cotton balls thicken and vines

swell with grapes?
Grace and necessity, the endless paradox.
Hungry, we open our mouths and arms,

and there, over the other's shoulder
we see the mountain, its craggy peak crowned
and waiting, even when it is hidden among clouds. (quoted in Roberts, 1998: 192-194)

This poem can indicate both the ambivalence of the subject position of the author, as well as how differences, both the desire for and the fear of them, can inform and enrichen the experience of both the "granite lap" as well as the "ancient valley seabed." Janzen is saying the possibilities of both sides, just as in the "official" and "unofficial" literature I have previously examined in this thesis, reach their potential in the interplay of difference and otherness. This dialogue is what allows the child to run between two positive, yet different, spaces and avow the realization of a contingent belonging.

Epilogue

Trauma is an amorphous and shifting entity for Mennonites. It is a signifier of many things beyond itself which attests to its salience in Mennonite life. That is, of the suffering experienced during Mennonite history – persecution and martyrs in the sixteenth century, the many migrations to infidelous monarchies of Prussia and Russia – what had been consistently referenced as a legitimizing force were the pages of dissent of the past. The proof of the Mennonites'/Anabaptists' existence and subjectivity became conversely proportionate to the suffering experienced. Quite simply, the fabric of Mennonite identity was woven in the threat of the present with the thread of the traumas of the past. With the rewriting of this history, Anabaptist suffering became the indication of a faith, a heritage which pointed to earliest Christianity, and a coherent identity. This trauma, though, has continued in the texts and lives of the group's participants. It has allowed itself to be made known in crucial texts that speak of Mennonite identity, in both the academic world and in the actual lives of Mennonites. This trauma makes more evident the ambivalent process of identification and affiliation that each text and individual must endure in order for it to extend beyond itself to allow its full representation.

To further explicate this ambivalent process of identification, I would like to offer a slight disclosure by means of example and explore my personal contingent relationship to the Mennonite community. In fact, my relationship to the Mennonite community often feels quite accidental; whereby I find myself placed precariously within it, but I constantly struggle with this placement that does not seem entirely intentional. Also, with each move

I make within the community I am drawn equally and almost violently away from it. At the same time that I love my friends that are apart of the community, I am very critical of Mennonites. I come away from staff meetings (I currently work at a social services agency run by The Mennonite Society for the Aid of Children and Families) and formal engagements (I have recently played guitar at a friend's wedding shower at my old church) almost in paroxysms that can leave me in tears uttering how cruel 'they' can be.

This deep ambivalence feels like a sentence – I am drawn to my history; there's something profound and moving that strikes me sitting and talking with my Oma about her experience in Russia – nourishing the impetus for my current studies. Yet to step into the church I grew up in can be quite painful – the eyes, the unknown thoughts about the boy that just left, and the language that often feels dead. Nevertheless, these strong contradictory thoughts have brought me to my current position, and it's like being brought back to some sort of trauma – the location of my ambivalence, the site where my body both finds and leaves itself, just to write about Mennonites. In an attempt to confront these feelings my work has served more to justify them and strengthen them. It has, rather, clothed me in words that settled my position as always inhabiting precariously liminal spaces. With this position comes the difficulty of negotiating the contradictions with the various points of identification – with my life within the community as well as outside of it. I am doubtful, now, whether or not I will ever resolve these tensions or ever really want to; yet, it does not negate the fact that these perpetual shifting affiliations require a sort of suspension that can allow me to be adequately a part of the various worlds and positions I now choose to inhabit, and those that are an inherent part of me and what I can claim as my history.

While this is not an extraordinary example, especially compared to the characters in *The Shunning*, it is this lack of extraordinariness which makes it all the more salient not only for Mennonite scholarship and literary criticism, but possibly for cultural studies as a whole. Since writing and history is an act of "fictioning"(Braun, 2001), Mennonite scholarship and literary criticism provides an interesting case study for the production of identity and the reading of the assumptions that determine this identity and its production in history. To be clear, this is not an attempt to trivialize this formation, but more of an exercise in witnessing its heightened import through the necessity to be critically and reflexively engaged in how one is participating within the historical process and its converse inspiration for contemporary identity formation and politics. It becomes clear, then, that within the writing of history it is also important to attempt the valorization of that which is forgotten. Whether these voids are intentional or merely an effect of certain particularistic tendencies and ways of wanting to read history is something that needs to be given critical attention. It begs the question of whether or not these voids, the "shunning" of certain identities and historical elements that are an inherent part of the gathering process, can ever be properly and adequately filled. This "amnesia" that is an effect of the gathering together of history is an indication of the inherent ambivalence in the various levels of historical production (cultural difference and cultural diversity). The traumatic split between the production of culture and its critical counterpart is one that echoes the rupture within language, and ultimately within the identification process of the subject. This realization may help Mennonite cultural studies to bridge the gaps that are reflective of the trauma of history and its production to traverse the 'no man's land' and the implicit

crossfire between these literatures that is the result.

Because this trauma continues to be formative in the lives of the group's members, it is important to give witness to it and allow a full representation from which creative and meaningful work can come. This work would allow for the knowledge of the fluctuating production of cultural difference – the conditions of possibilities to interact with difference in a way that is also meaningful and reflexive, rather than merely threatening, exclusive, and destructive. This work would also be attentive to the conditions and implicit assumptions that give rise to the artifact of cultural diversity, and its necessary perpetual reiteration.

I would like to end this discussion by imagining the body of the text. While I imagine it, I unknowingly bring with it its history (in whatever sense), its scars and memories almost forgotten – separations or joinings, as well as the excess of the subject that goes beyond its intentional grasp. I believe it is the excess that becomes the interesting part – it implies otherness and others, the confrontation with that which is not same, yet holds the same in its grasp. While it embraces the body of the same it seems to almost mold it, change it – and place demands upon it. What is this unity of subject then, if not a series of fissures and ruptures, traumas as well as caresses that become the subject, or maybe follow the subject through a process. Through these confrontations with the other, the subject is continually and contingently transformed. At the same time, however, there lurks a danger that implies the outline of the body exists always already in a state of dissolution. This body itself is quite simply not the body in itself, but subject to the forces of contingency, a word that is also something beyond the two parts from which it is

formed. It is this break, this trauma, the ambivalence of a word and a body, that draws it into a growing relation with the other.

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